

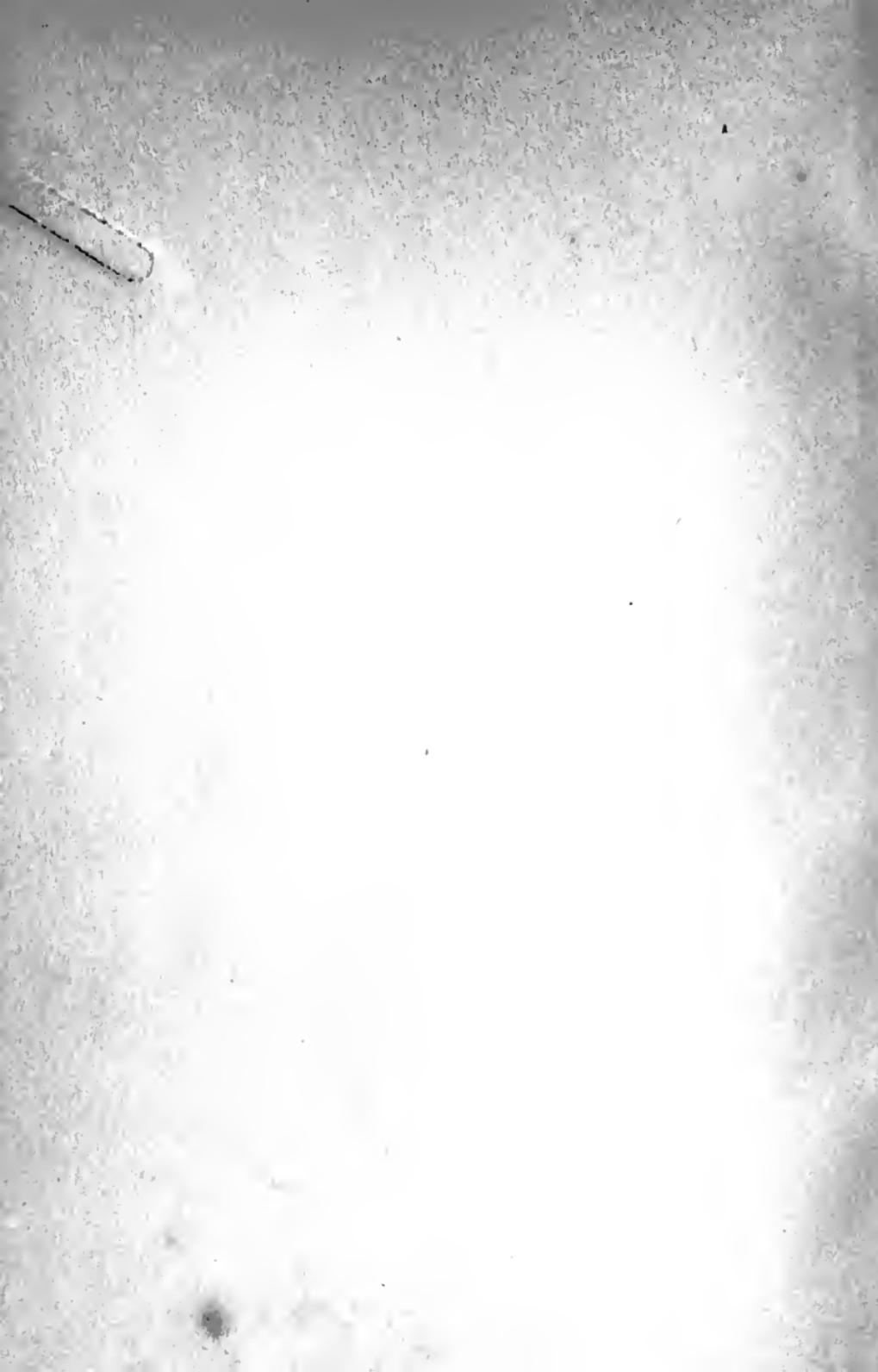
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

L 3

T. H. Nicholls
wish hearty Xmas
greetings & best
wishes from

H. Stunk

Dec 2/12



JOHN SCARLETT, GANGER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**THE MAN FROM CURDIE'S
RIVER**

Popular Edition, 6d.

LONDON : HODDER AND STOUGHTON

JOHN SCARLETT, GANGER

BY

DONALD MACLEAN

AUTHOR OF

'THE MAN FROM CURDIE'S RIVER'

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

Printed in 1912

Stack
Annex

PR
4971
M356j
1912

DEDICATION

TO HER FROM WHOM I LEARNED THAT LIFE CONSISTS
NOT IN HOLDING ALL THE TRUMP CARDS, BUT
IN PLAYING A POOR HAND WELL, THE
BRAVEST HEART I EVER KNEW—

MY MOTHER

2215010



CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
MR. SECRETARY SMITH IS A DISAPPOINTED MAN	I

CHAPTER II

CONCERNING JOHN SCARLETT, AND MELBOURNE TEA- ROOMS	6
---	---

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH A LISTENER HEARS NO GOOD FOR HIMSELF	II
---	----

CHAPTER IV

THE GENERAL STATES THE POSITION	16
---	----

CHAPTER V

OFF TO POWLETT RIVER	20
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI

JOHN SCARLETT IS THE WRONG MAN	25
--	----

CHAPTER VII

	PAGE
THE HUSTLER	30

CHAPTER VIII

THE 'OLD BULL AND BUSH'	38
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH JOHN SCARLETT ARGUES A KNOTTY PROBLEM	44
--	----

CHAPTER X

THE BABYLONIANS	49
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER XI

AT THE SEVENTEEN MILE	58
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XII

JOHN DRAWS FIRST BLOOD	64
----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIII

'BATING THE DIVIL'	72
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XIV

THE LADY OF THE CAMP	78
--------------------------------	----

CONTENTS

ix

CHAPTER XV

	PAGE
PROS AND CONS	88

CHAPTER XVI

FATHER CHRISTMAS COMES DOWN	96
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER XVII

THE RAID	101
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. CHIRNSIDE TURNS UP	107
----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIX

THE COMBAT	117
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XX

THE REAL AUSTRALIA	125
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXI

GOSSIP	132
------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXII

CONCERNING LOVE	137
---------------------------	-----

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXIII	
THE LITTLE CHURCH IN THE HILLS	141
CHAPTER XXIV	
JOHN'S ONE TALENT GETS A CHANCE	147
CHAPTER XXV	
ASTOUNDING BEHAVIOUR OF JOHN	152
CHAPTER XXVI	
HOME FROM THE PLAY	160
CHAPTER XXVII	
THE PROBLEM OF THE 'PILGRIM'	167
CHAPTER XXVIII	
THE MAN OF RIGHTS	174
CHAPTER XXIX	
JOHN GOES OUT TO TEA	178
CHAPTER XXX	
PAY-NIGHT	188

CONTENTS

xi

CHAPTER XXXI

	PAGE
THE BUN STRUGGLE	201

CHAPTER XXXII

THE STORY OF ACHAN	208
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SNAG	226
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIV

'CUM GRANO SALIS'	233
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXV

EXIT THE 'BLUE PIG'	244
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVI

A DAY IN CANVAS TOWN	253
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVII

BLUEBELL	258
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE YANK TAKES A HAND	266
---------------------------------	-----

	CHAPTER XXXIX	PAGE
JOHN RECEIVES A LETTER	273	
	CHAPTER XL	
SCARLETT'S SHIVOO	280	
	CHAPTER XLI	
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS	288	
	CHAPTER XLII	
'GOODBYE, SHEILA'	296	

CHAPTER I

MR. SECRETARY SMITH IS A DISAPPOINTED MAN

'I'LL be hanged if I know now but what I've made the biggest blunder of my life.' So saying, Mr. Secretary Smith flung his pencil on the desk, pushed back his chair, and looked up at his assistant, who was standing in the doorway between the offices, whither he had come expectantly when he heard the door close behind the visitor.

'What's the matter with him?' the assistant inquired anxiously.

'Matter! Everything's the matter. He's such a—a weed, for one thing.'

'He's a weed all right,' the assistant agreed, surveying his own portly figure with approval in the mirror opposite, and making a mental comparison, 'but still, it is not *all* in fat, you know.'

'And he's not only a weed to look at,' the General went on unheedingly, wrinkling up his forehead and tugging furiously at his big moustache, 'but he has no personality—he's as nervous as a girl—he blushed like a girl, too, when he came in. And he has nothing to say for himself, either—he only made one remark the whole time he was here.'

'What was that?'

'Why, when I told him that in all probability the work would be dangerous, because the men

on this line were just about the scum of the earth, he said, "Well, I suppose they'll stop short of murder?"

"He didn't seem to be bluffed, then?"

"Bluffed? No; but he didn't seem to realise the kind of thing he's taking on, either, and that's partly the trouble. If he had savvy enough to know, he might have been bluffed, for it will be no kindergarten. No," the General went on again after a pause in which he weighed the matter over carefully, "he's not the kind I was after. I wanted a manly man, a *manly-looking* man—one who would impress the men—and that's what this chap will never do. It's terrible," he continued, presently. "I see great possibilities in this field work, but the Board is not keen on it. They think we've too many irons in the fire as it is, and if this fellow makes a mess of things in the beginning, it's goodbye to all its possibilities for ever."

"But we had good reports of his work amongst the timber-getters in the West," the assistant ventured.

"Yes, we had, and I brought him here on the strength of them; but, after all, what are reports? Still," he added, "this is no good. We've got him now on our shoulders, like the Old Man of the Sea, and we'll have to carry him and see what he'll do, but I hope and pray he'll turn out better than he looks."

Having nothing to say to this, the assistant went back to his place, and the General turned to the pile of letters on his desk, but every now and then he would pause in his work and rest his chin in his hand, while his thoughts ran after the man who had recently left him. And the more he thought, the more convinced was he that Mr. John

Scarlett would prove the square peg in the round hole.

'It's a question of man, man, man, right through the piece,' he muttered, 'a man for men: the right man would have made this thing hum, and now we're saddled with this—this—young woman.' He relieved his feelings somewhat by banging the last letter down and ringing for the stenographer.

And making due allowance for all things, the 'General,' as his staff affectionately called him, had some cause for his perturbation. He was General Secretary of the Y.M.C.A., and a short time previously had stumbled across an engineer engaged on the new railway to the Powlett River coalfields. The engineer had sketched a graphic picture of the horrors of the life the men were compelled to lead in the camps—the 'two-up' schools, the women, the 'shanties,' the drink and debauchery, and the total absence of all comfort, amusement, or recreation, save such as the shanties provided. 'Couldn't something be done for those men?' he wanted to know. The General's big heart was touched and stirred. He thought something could be done, and resolved to try, and accordingly, having studied the matter out, at the next meeting of the Board of Control, he laid down a scheme which he thought would meet the case.

There was nothing remarkable about the scheme. They were simply to find out a suitable man and equip him with a big marquee, well supplied with books, papers, magazines, writing and Post Office facilities, together with games of various kinds, and a portable organ and phonograph, and send him down to camp amongst the men, the idea being to create a social centre where the men might come and put in their evenings,

and where religious services could be held on Sundays.

Some of the younger members were enthusiastic, but the Board as a whole was sceptical—they had so many things on hand—the financial problem was pressing—and in the end the General won but a reluctant assent. However, assent was given, and if only he could make good and justify the undertaking, all would be well, and a beginning made with what might prove to be a great national movement ; but if the scheme broke down, his reputation, to say nothing of the interests of the Association, would suffer severely.

Having won the consent of the Board, the first problem to be faced in connection with the new venture was that of the man to take charge of it ; for the General rightly felt that, humanly speaking, the whole thing depended upon the leader. If he could get the right man, all would be well, but if the wrong man were sent, the work would simply crumble in his hands.

For a time it seemed as though he would never find the one he was looking for, but at length he heard of a man named Scarlett, who had done a good work in a timber-getters' camp in the West, and after such further inquiry as was possible, Smith wired to know if he could come East and take up the work, and when a reply in the affirmative was received, he wired again for him to come at once. Smith felt he was taking risks, but time was short, 'and anyhow,' he said, when this was pointed out to him, 'a man must take risks or take a back seat.'

But it must be acknowledged that when the man from the West, after knocking timidly, came awkwardly into the office, the General felt that he had taken a risk too many. It needed but a

glance at the spare form, the thin, clean-shaven, nervous face, the stylish, almost foppish, cut of the clothes, to convince him that he had got the wrong man, and, moreover, it required but a moment's reflection to see that he was in a clove-hitch in regard to him. He had brought him a sea-journey of two thousand miles, to say nothing of two or three hundred by land, at great expense, and he could not now dismiss him without giving him a trial. There was nothing for it but to send him on and take the further risk. But after flying his kite so high, and prophesying such great things from the new move, it was one of the biggest set-backs the General had ever experienced, and he was correspondingly disappointed.

CHAPTER II

CONCERNING JOHN SCARLETT AND MELBOURNE TEA-ROOMS

BUT what of the man whose mere appearance upon the scene had laid Smith's high hopes in the dust? Descending the steps into the street a good deal more lightly than he had gone up them, he gave vent to a sigh of relief.

'Well, thank Heaven, that's over!' he said to himself as he slid his hands into his pockets and set off along the footpath. 'I like him, but I'm afraid he doesn't think much of me. And it's not to be wondered at,' he added presently, with something of bitterness, and then walked moodily on in no very pleasant frame of mind. After a time he came to a halt before the window of a large draper's shop, and surveyed his reflection therein critically and with considerable disfavour. It was quite as the General had said—he was physically a 'weed,' and there was no denying the fact; nor could he see a single redeeming feature in the face that looked out at him from the glass.

He knew full well what kind of face was required for such work as he had given himself to, but his was not that kind. The mouth especially disappointed him. He coveted one the lips of which clamped together like the jaws of a

mantrap ; but his were of another pattern, and, like Sentimental Tommy's, merely rested one upon the other.

' What could a fellow do with a mouth like that ? ' he demanded of himself, with an expression akin to contempt. His mouth was his chief trouble. His pale blue and rather sleepy eyes did not concern him much, but he fairly glared at his thin, sandy-coloured hair ; *that*, he felt, was another weak spot in his panoply of war. ' If it had only been black ! ' he sighed.

The clothes did not trouble him as they did the General. They, unlike his mouth and hair, were of his own choosing. He saw nothing incongruous in them—in fact, he was rather proud of them ; and, in any case, they were not fixtures, as the others were, and he could lay them aside when the occasion demanded it.

Presently he turned his back upon the window and strolled slowly along until he came to the cathedral corner. There he was brought up standing at sight of the rush of traffic along Swanston Street to the railway-station.

Flinders Street Station, Melbourne, is believed to be the busiest passenger station in the world, and, strange as this may seem when one remembers that the population of Melbourne is but a little over half a million, there are solid grounds for the belief, for every ordinary day something like one hundred and fifty thousand people pass in and out its gates.

And in some respects there is no sight more remarkable to be seen in these Southern lands than this great flood of humanity going forth to its labour till the evening, and then returning home. The tide from the suburbs begins to flow citywards in the early hours of the morning,

reaching flood tide between eight and nine o'clock. The ebb begins about four in the afternoon, and from five to six races out like a torrent ; and it was this backwash now beginning that Scarlett stood aside to see.

For a time he watched the ever-increasing volume with interest not unmixed with wonder, for after some years in the vast, empty spaces of the wide-spreading Western State, the sight of these hurrying multitudes almost bewildered him. But he soon became accustomed to them, and after a time his eyes turned inward, so to speak, and he lost sight of the crowds in the conflict of his thoughts. But it was no longer the problem of his mouth and hair that engaged him ; that had given place to another. He had the remainder of the afternoon and the whole of the evening before him, and the question was, What should he do with them? Should he return to his lodgings and do some very necessary preparation for the work he was soon to set about, or should he go down the block, have afternoon tea in some dainty tea-room, and go to a concert or picture show to finish up?

Work, with a singular resemblance to duty, called him loudly from the city, but inclination and the lure of the tea-rooms were too strong ; and presently, turning to the right, he strolled along Swanston Street to Collins Street, and so down the block. But as he went his conscience smote him as Balaam his ass, and he reflected miserably that had his lips only clamped together he would probably have gone home to work.

One may live many weeks in Melbourne before he is acquainted with its multitude of tea-rooms. Indeed, one may live a lifetime in the city, and be unconscious of their manifold existence. But

there they are in the oddest places—downstairs in basements, upstairs in attics, tucked away in corners, anywhere and everywhere but where you expect to meet them ; and the best, of course, are those which are most difficult to find. But Scarlett knew his Melbourne well.

In the old days that were not so old, before he had gone to find a fortune in the Golden West, and had found instead a new conception and ideal in life, he had been a clerk in a city bank, and it had been his custom after leaving the office at four o'clock to go with the multitude to one or other of the tea-rooms. There he would drink delight of battle with his peers, in the shape of tea or coffee ; and there too, where it was permissible, he would smoke cigarettes with a mature air, and discuss the points of the fair Hebes in attendance ; or if it chanced—as it periodically did—that the land lay that way, he would hungrily follow their movements with his eyes in the sweet misery of unrequited love : a love which was somehow fed and fostered by the languorous music of a Hungarian band. In those days Scarlett learnt the tea-room system off by heart, and to-day, after three years in the strenuous West, the old glamour of it all came thick upon him, and shortly after he had drifted to a decision—as a derelict comes to a beach—he had found his way into one of his old haunts, and was stretched out luxuriously in the corner of a big, soft, leather-covered sofa, his feet up and his hands locked behind his head ; and there, for a delicious hour, he was well content to lie—idly watching through a fog of tobacco smoke the graceful figures of the waiting-girls as they flitted to and fro, and listening dreamily to the seductive music of Mendelssohn's “ Spring Song ” tossing lightly

10 CONCERNING JOHN SCARLETT

above the low, euphonious murmuring of many voices.

Nobody noticed him. Nobody ever did notice him. Even the girl who served him, and whose business it was to take special interest in everybody, could not have told the next minute anything at all about him ; and that was precisely as he wished it, for the old confidence with which three years ago he had engaged these pretty girls in conversation had completely departed from him. Probably, in the first place, it was merely a kind of wolf-pack confidence born of the numbers of the young cubs with whom he used to come, and was not truly part of him ; but however that may be, it is unquestionable that now it had given place to shyness, and he did not so much as lift his eyes to the face of the waitress when giving his order.

After it was executed nobody spoke to him or troubled him, and he lay soaking, so to speak, in the seductive atmosphere of his surroundings. In some undefined degree Scarlett had within him the instincts of an artist or a poet, and for that reason this place, with its perfumes, music, and beautiful women, appealed to him mightily, and letting the reins of his fancy loose, he gave himself up to the full enjoyment of it.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH A LISTENER HEARS NO GOOD FOR HIMSELF

AFTER a time Scarlett became conscious of a conversation going on between two men at a table close by. They had only recently entered, and one, who seemed from his appearance to have come from the country, did most of the talking.

It was the word 'Powlett' which first caught Scarlett's wandering attention and arrested it, for Powlett in those days was a name to conjure with. The great coal strike in the North, the prospects of a great coal famine, the opportune discovery of vast deposits of coal in the Powlett River basin, less than one hundred miles from Melbourne, the swift decision of the Victorian Government (notwithstanding fierce opposition) to open up the deposits, the feverish rapidity with which the fields were being developed and a railway pushed towards them had struck the imagination of the Commonwealth to such an extent that, for a time, Powlett was more talked of than politics, and the man who had been there was everywhere listened to as an oracle, while he who had sailed the world round was by comparison considered untravelled and commonplace.

In Scarlett's case there was the additional fact that it was in this Powlett River country he was

to do his work ; consequently the bare mention of the place was sufficient to bring him back to earth, listening eagerly for information concerning it. But it was not so much of the country as of men that the newcomers talked.

'Work !' he of the backblocks was saying, 'the Super beats the band. I never saw anything like him. He's never in bed before midnight, and he's up again at five every morning. How he stands it is the mystery, for there isn't a great deal of him except length. But work seems to be meat and drink to him, and he's just a glutton for it. And the worst of it is,' the man went on, 'he seems to infect everybody about him with the same complaint. You catch it from him like a disease. I am not a hog for work, as you know, but somehow I never feel justified in going to bed now until he goes, and I can't for shame's sake stay in after he gets up. I was thirteen stone eight when I went up there barely three months ago ; to-day I weighed on the railway-station at Nyora coming down and I'm barely eleven. I'm nothing but a clothes-rack.'

'How about the others?' the city man asked.

'Same as me,' the first replied. 'Robertson, the engineer in charge of the section from Nyora to the Bass River, has worked himself nearly blind. Kelly, the boss of the platelayers, was the life of the camp when we first went up, but he never speaks a word now ; he's like a fellow running a long race, and knows if he speaks he won't have breath enough to finish. Big Tom Johnston, the bridge foreman, is in the same condition. He hasn't said anything but "Yes" and "No" for weeks. When he gives directions he gives them like a dumb man, by signs.'

The coming of the tea-girl switched their

thoughts off on to other lines. What would they have? The engineer laughed.

'Made me think of Black Charlie,' he remarked presently, by way of explanation to his friend —'our cook, you know, or chef, as we have to call him, he never asks us what we'll have; he gives us what he thinks proper, and we just have to take it and be thankful, whether we like it or not. There isn't one of them, from the assistant engineers down, who is not afraid of the Super; but the Super himself is afraid of Charlie. It's very funny!'

There was another interruption then, owing to the girl returning with their order, and by the time she had finished her work and gone the conversation had shifted to the navvies who were employed on the work. Scarlett listened with all his ears. Now he would hear something.

'What class of men have you got?' the city man was asking.

'Men!' the other replied in tones of contempt, 'they're not men at all—they're beasts! And you have to treat them like beasts. I've seen some pretty rough stuff, as you know, at Marble Bar and Broome and on the goldfields line in the West, but these beat all. Possibly they would not be so bad if it were not for the shanties and the women. But there they are—they work like galley-slaves in the daytime and drink like swine and fight like devils at night. Pay nights especially the camps are like hell. I wouldn't live a week in one of them for a pension. It wouldn't be safe if a man had anything to lose,' he went on. 'Some of those fellows would blow your light out for a drink. How do we manage?' he echoed in reply to a question by the other. 'Oh, we have our "portables," and take jolly fine

CHAPTER IV

THE GENERAL STATES THE POSITION

IT was necessary to the success of the undertaking to enlist, if possible, the sympathy of the Chief Engineer of Railways, and get transport for the outfit over such part of the new line as had been laid down, so the General and Scarlett went the following day to seek an interview and lay the scheme before the chief. The prospect of bearding this lion in his den filled Scarlett with dismay, and he would gladly have escaped the ordeal had it been possible. The General may have been perturbed also, but, if so, he made no sign, and together they set out. However, what fears they may have entertained as to their reception were, once inside the office, quickly dispelled. They found the chief infinitely more approachable than the hall porter, and their requests had only to be made known to be granted, and in fifteen minutes their business was complete and their course clear.

'It will be best for you to go down as far as Nyora by the late train,' the chief concluded; 'put up at the hotel for the night if you can get a bed, and make your arrangements with Mr. Ferguson, the superintending engineer, to get your stuff aboard a construction train. You will probably get it down the new line the following day—that is, as far as the line goes. We'll see you

through as far as that. But if you decide to camp at Kilkunda, you'll have to make what arrangements you can to get your outfit the rest of the way.'

'Well, we can't ask more than that!' the General replied, well pleased; 'and if you get us as far as the end of the line, we'll manage the other.'

'I promise you that,' the chief responded briskly, 'and anything else we can do to help you we'll gladly do. I wish you luck! Goodbye!'

'Goodbye, and thank you!'

'Good man the chief!' the General remarked as he and Scarlett descended the stairs towards the street. 'It isn't every one who would put himself about to help us as he is doing. But he's really a big man every way, and my experience of big men is that they are always ready to listen to a reasonable proposition. In fact, it takes a big man to see the value of little things—not that this work of ours is little,' he added, 'but it might easily appear so to a little man.'

'And where is our special value to the chief engineer?' Scarlett asked innocently.

The question was unfortunate from every point of view, and the General's gorge rose against his henchman. What kind of a fellow *was* he? What kind of man *had* he got hold of? He groaned inwardly at the thought of committing this work to such a numskull.

'What's our value to the chief?' he echoed with heat, tinged with sarcasm. 'It will depend upon you very largely. If you can manage to win the confidence of the men and make our place sufficiently attractive, the camp will shift its centre from the shanties, round which it swings now, and swing round us, and that will make all the

difference in the world to the chief. For if we succeed in keeping the men away from the drink, it means that the chief will have men he can depend upon for his work, where he can't depend upon them now. And what's more, he will get far more work out of them then than he can while they are eternally suffering a recovery from drink, as at present. Then again, with games, reading matter, and entertainments, and a place where they can spend their evenings comfortably, the men will be far more contented, and the engineers will be able to keep them on the job till it's finished, which is more than they can do now—and that's something from an engineer's point of view ; for every new man who is taken on has to be broken in and taught his work, and it's all so much waste time. That's our value to the chief,' the General concluded, as he ran up the steps of headquarters ; ' that is,' he added, ' if we make good—but,' and this with a disparaging look at his subordinate, ' it's a man's work.'

Now, all these things Scarlett knew quite well, and had asked his question more for the sake of having something to say than for information, and he was upon the point of telling Mr. Smith so in very hard words, for he felt the sting in the remarks, and bitterly resented it, but on second thoughts he decided that nothing could be gained by doing so, and mastering his anger, he climbed the stairs to the bathroom. Nobody was about at that hour, and he stood a minute before a large mirror and steadfastly regarded himself. He ran his fingers through his thin red hair, stood it up straight on his head, and looked at it. From his hair his gaze fell to his mouth, the lines of which he studied with rueful countenance, then he flung away from the mirror in disgust.

'It's no wonder the General can't get up any faith in me,' he muttered. 'Hair like this, and mouth like this—I can hardly believe in myself.'

'But,' he added presently with fierce energy, dashing his hat on the floor and tearing off his collar, 'I've begun to do several things many times, and I've always made good at the last. The General may look askance at me now, and wish to Heaven he could get rid of me, but he won't until I've had a try, and, God helping me, I shall make good, and he and everybody else will have to admit it.'

He did not know—for he was a very usual young man and his field of history (like that field of the slothful man in the Scriptures) was all grown over with thorns—he did not know that one of the greatest Stars that shine down upon us from the fretted political sky of the nineteenth century began his amazing career in somewhat similar mood, and with almost identical words. But chancing at that moment to again catch sight of his face in the glass, he was almost startled at its look of fierce determination ; the jaws were locked together like the jaws of a bulldog, while the eyes fairly snapped, and while he stood astonished, contemplating this amazing transformation, he quite forgot about the colour of his hair.

CHAPTER V

OFF TO POWLETT RIVER

VICTORIA, roughly speaking, is divided into four great provinces, though the dividing is the work of use and custom rather than of surveyor or engineer. There is the wealthy Western District out towards the South Australian border ; the Mallee, which describes the great wheat belt in the north, running east and west along the Murray ; Gippsland, in the extreme east, which lies towards the sea and is washed by the Pacific all the way round from Westernport to New South Wales ; and, finally, the Central Province, which contains the capital and the very heart of the State, but has no special designation as have the others.

Gippsland may fittingly be called the Highlands of Australia, and is in many respects the most romantic province of them all. In Gippsland grow, if Von Mueller may be believed, the tallest trees in the world. In Gippsland rise Australia's highest mountains. From Gippsland go out the great rivers which water the earth of the southern interior. No part of the land has such splendid lakes. Nowhere else in Australia shall you find ski-ing and snow-shoeing and skating, for nowhere else does the snow fall so thickly, or the water freeze sufficiently hard to bear the weight of the

skater. All manner of metals are mined there, from gold to tin. Whole mountains of marble, rivalling in their purity the finest Carrara, lie ready to the hand of the sculptor, and there, too, are endless quantities of coal.

Gippsland, because of its forests, its mountains, its wildness, and its inaccessibility, was for long the Cinderella of Victoria's provinces, but to-day it is coming to its own, and its future is big with possibility.

Some of these things John Scarlett remembered and pondered as, having placed his swag in a compartment of the South-East Express, he sat at the window watching the type of people who were boarding her. He had never been in Gippsland, and was looking forward with keen interest to seeing that romantic country. His reflections, however, were cut short by the appearance of the General, with a great swag done up in military fashion slung across his shoulders, and followed by a seedy-looking individual of middle age bearing an old-fashioned carpet-bag and a basket of carpenter's tools.

'This way!' Scarlett shouted as soon as he saw them. 'Room here!'

'Good!' the General answered approvingly, as he made his way into the car and piled his swag on the rack.

'This way, Anderson!' he called to the seedy one. 'Plenty of room here! Want to keep my eye on him,' he said in an aside to Scarlett. Then, as the individual concerned pushed his way into the compartment: 'I was detained at the office and had to cut it fine. But in time is good time.'

The stowing of their luggage occupied the General and his companion some moments, and

by the time it was finished the train was already clear of the station and swinging round the curve towards Richmond.

Scarlett had reserved seats for his companions by the old-fashioned but effective expedient of sitting down himself and piling his goods and chattels on a great part of the seat opposite. These being now removed and all settled, the General introduced his seedy follower as 'Mr. Anderson.' He explained that the gentleman in question was a carpenter coming down to aid in the erection of the marquee.

Mr. Anderson shook hands feebly with a damp, clammy hand, but found energy enough to deny the carpentership, claiming with thin dignity to be a cabinet-maker. The General apologised, and Scarlett, in his short, nervous sentences, professed himself highly gratified at making Mr. Anderson's acquaintance, though it did occur to him as rather odd that a cabinet-maker should be so shabbily dressed and engaged upon such a primitive job as the erection of a marquee.

However, he was not left to puzzle over the matter for any length of time, for Mr. Anderson presently getting into conversation with a grizzly farmer next to him, the General took the opportunity to lean over and explain that the cabinet-maker was a good man gone to the devil through drink, that he had picked him up at the Gospel Hall in Little Bourke Street, and had brought him along as much for the sake of getting him away from temptation as for any use he might be.

'But what's the matter with his face?' Scarlett asked.

The General laughed. 'It's one of the oddest things I've come across for a long time,' he said. 'Poor old Anderson was coming across Queen's

Bridge from South Melbourne last Saturday afternoon—sober as I am now, for a wonder—when he happened to meet two drunken German sailors. For some reason or another they didn't like the look of him, and took and gave him an unmerciful hiding. Fortunately for Anderson, or unfortunately, I hardly know which, two policemen arrived in the thick of it, and arrested all three of them and took them off to the lock-up. Old Anderson protested his innocence all the way ; but it wasn't a bit of good ; they locked them all up on a charge of disorderly conduct, and kept them there until the court sat on Monday. The end of it was, the sailors were fined five pounds each, and Anderson was discharged with a caution. But if you want to hear him go off about British justice, just mention the thing to him. "The sailors had the fun," he says, "the Government had the ten pounds, and I got a terrible hiding and thirty-six hours in gaol." And really, when you come to think of it, it was a bit too bad.' And when Scarlett looked at the battered face of the cabinet-maker, he was inclined to agree that it was.

By this time the city was left behind them, and the train, running express, had passed through the beautiful stretch of residential suburbs that extend to Oakleigh, and was roaring its way up into the hills with the Dandenong Ranges on the left. The weather was blistering hot, for it was early January ; the sun was low on the horizon, showing like a great blazing disc through a thin haze of smoke, but the rush of the express created a cooling breeze, and there came to them the good fresh smell of the soil tanged with the odour of bush and scrub.

The General seemed a new man in his new surroundings. He had left care behind in the office,

and meant to make the most of this little break in the office routine. Old Anderson sat with his eyes closed and head at rest against the wall of the carriage, contentedly puffing his pipe, and Scarlett, for his part, lay back in his hard corner and thought it luxury. For the time being he had contrived to banish the nightmare of the coming work from his mind.

Probably no man was ever more eager to win the approval of his superiors than Scarlett, and it was with a great deal of thankfulness he observed that Smith was more cordial to him than he had yet been. He did not worry himself trying to account for the change in the General ; he was quite content to know and rejoice in it, though it is safe to say that the reason, had he known it, would have filled him with amazement.

For, in Smith's eyes, the greatest of all Scarlett's offences was the foppishness of his clothes. Severely plain and practical in himself, anything tending in the direction of foppery jarred upon him terribly, and Scarlett's loud tweeds, split tails, and patent leather boots had been to him like an orange rosette to an Irishman. But to-day Scarlett had undergone a transformation, and when Smith arrived upon the station and found him arrayed in an old and tough-looking suit of grey serge, strong, serviceable boots surmounted by a pair of leggings a good deal the worse for wear, and having on the back of his head an old slouch hat, he realised that he was not altogether lost to a sense of the fitness of things, and thawed accordingly.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN SCARLETT IS THE WRONG MAN

THE General was not much of a talker as a rule, but to-day the freedom from the office, the exhilaration of the flying express, and the good, clean scent of the bush carried him out of himself.

'How did you first come to engage in this kind of work?' he asked presently.

'How do you mean exactly?' Scarlett replied, with a rather puzzled expression of face.

'Why, how did you come to take up work amongst the timber-getters?'

'Timber-getters? What work?'

'Don't try to be funny!' the General rasped somewhat shortly. 'You were running a kind of social centre amongst the timber-getters on the Great Southern in West Australia, weren't you?'

'No, I was not. I was never in a timber-getters' camp in my life.'

'What!' the General gasped, sitting bolt upright. 'Say that over again!'

'I will, if you're deaf,' Scarlett replied, somewhat nettled. 'I was never in a timber-getters' camp in my life, and what's more, there are no timber-getters' camps on the Great Southern, they are in the Jarrah country, and that's in another quarter of the State altogether.'

The General looked at him for a full half-minute, as though unable to believe his ears ; then he crumpled up and sank back in his seat like a man stricken with paralysis. Presently, however, he rallied sufficiently to lean forward and ask—

‘Then how, in the name of all that is wonderful, do you come to be here?’

‘How do I come to be here?’ Scarlett answered in turn. ‘Well, that’s pretty cool ! Didn’t you wire me to come?’

The General shook his head wearily. ‘I give it up,’ he said. ‘I telegraphed certainly, but I understood you were working amongst the men in a timber-getters’ camp away down in the Jarrah country. Your name is Scarlett—John Scarlett?’ he added, bethinking himself.

‘Yes, it is. I was a clerk in the W. A. Bank in Perth, and in the Association there, and when your telegram came to me in the care of Jameson, the secretary, they handed it over, and after thinking it out I decided to accept, so I threw up my billet and came.’

The General stared at him during this narration with open mouth, and for a time was too bewildered to make any further remark, then light seemed slowly to dawn upon him.

‘Did Jameson himself give you that telegram?’ he asked directly.

‘No. Jameson was away on the goldfields ; the assistant gave it to me.’

The General smote his leg. ‘That accounts for it !’ he cried ; ‘there must have been two Scarlettes (though in all my life I never came across another of the same name), and that ass in the office bungled things up. If Jamie had been there it would not have happened. There is no doubt my luck is in,’ he groaned ; and pulling his hat

over his eyes, he leaned back in his seat to do some hard thinking.

What *was* he to do? That was the query. He was pledged to this work, and the outfit was all aboard the train—it must go on. But what possible hope was there of making good? He could not stay in the camp longer than to see the tent up, even if every navvy's life depended upon it. Was there nobody to whom he could wire to come and take charge? Try as he would, he could think of no one, and at last he was forced to the conclusion that he must leave Scarlett in charge, be the consequences what they may; but the mental picture that arose when he thought of this city-bred dandy in the midst of the toughs and shanties of a navvies' camp filled him with such dismay that he uttered no further word until the express ran shrieking into Nyora.

In the great days yet to be Nyora will in all probability be a large and important railway town, but at the time when Mr. Secretary Smith and his followers alighted there from the Gippsland express, it could boast but half a dozen houses. There was a store, a butcher's shop, a blacksmith's shop, a church (used once a month), two or three places for railway men, and last—and first, in those days—a public-house.

Craning his neck from the window as they came near, it seemed to Scarlett the ugliest and least inviting place he had ever set eyes upon. Numberless fires had burnt their way through all the surrounding country, and all that was left of once stately forest was a wilderness of blackened stumps and stunted scrub. Such an appearance of desolation and misery hung about the place as cannot be described—only felt.

Scarlett, like most men of artistic temperament,

was peculiarly susceptible to scenery and environment, and the first sight of this uninviting country sent a chill through his blood and filled him with depression and misery. However, an all-wise Providence has decreed that for most diseases there is an antidote close by for him who has eyes to see. The natural antidote for 'blues' is activity, and as they drew near to the station yard Scarlett found it on all sides of him.

The work of the day was over, and the rank and file of the navvies were, for the most part, engaged in culinary operations before their tents. Everywhere their fires flashed brightly, and there came to the travellers, borne upon the breeze, the fragrant, indescribable smell of burning gum-leaves, impregnated with the reek of frying meat, and as the express came running down the line, the men about the fires paused in their operations, and stood silhouetted against the sky, pan or pot in hand, each one a statue of robust manhood, curiously watching its arrival.

The yard, as they came into it, seemed to Scarlett a chaos of timber and iron, and such it was. The little goods shed, built in other days to suit the small needs of the few farmers and fruit-growers in the district, had, like some tiny dam in the way of a spring flood, burst its sides with the unwonted pressure, spilling a flood of boxes, cases and machinery, iron and timber, all over the place. Everywhere he looked trucks were to be seen in process of loading and unloading, while a number of engines, that seemed out of breath with the heat of the day and long running, panted wearily here and there in obedience to the directions of a small individual with a prodigious whistle, and on all sides was the hurry and confusion consequent upon the breaking and

making-up of trains. And when at length the express pulled up, and they alighted on the platform, they found themselves at once in the midst of a crowd of roughly dressed, and, for the most part, rough-looking men, pushing, swearing, laughing, but too much engrossed in the arrival of the express and the chances of getting a city paper to take the least notice of John Scarlett or anybody else.

CHAPTER VII

THE HUSTLER

A 'PORTABLE' is a wooden building made in sections and so arranged that it can be dumped down anywhere, and by the mere process of bolting the different sections together a weather-proof house is provided in an incredibly short space of time. A tent is very well, but a portable is not much more difficult to erect, and once erected there is no further anxiety, and for that reason they are usually furnished to the engineering staffs on Government works.

The portables of the engineers employed on the Powlett River Railway were pitched on clear ground close to the railway line, but some distance back from the station, and thither the General and his followers bent their steps as soon as their belongings were safely deposited in the station office. Their object in going was to see the superintending engineer, and learn what their prospects were of getting their outfit along the line. Scarlett, bearing in mind the conversation he had heard in the tea-room, was all eagerness to see a man with such a terrific appetite for work as the engineer had described, and, as they stumbled along the line towards the portables, tried to imagine what he would be like.

He mentally sketched a small, fiery, Captain

Kettle type of man, quick and irritable in his manner, and jerking himself about from place to place like a figure on springs. But when they stood at the door of the portable and looked in, instead of the figure he had imagined he saw some six feet of languid indolence leaning lazily against the wall, with one hand in his trousers pocket and the other holding to his ear a telephone receiver.

The man's hair was fair and curling, but his beard, which he wore full, probably from lack of time to shave, was soft and silky, with a tendency to raggedness. He raised his eyes languidly when the visitors appeared in the doorway, but betrayed no surprise at seeing them. Indeed, for him to have assumed a look of surprise, or to have altered the set of his features in any way, would have required the exercise of more energy than Mr. Ferguson appeared to possess. Any one looking less like a hustler, or less calculated to inspire a thousand men of all ranks with a feverish activity in their work, it would have been impossible to imagine, and Scarlett, after the first glance, was inclined to believe they had struck the wrong man.

With more experience and a better knowledge of his countrymen he might, however, have formed a different opinion of that long, loose-jointed frame. For who in this land cannot recall at will thrilling days of international cricket, when Trumble, Laver, Armstrong, Noble, all of them of this type, would lounge out from the pavilion to face a position that was the despair of Australia and the joy of Britain, and, going to work in their tired way with apparent indifference to the result, would yet contrive by indomitable patience and skill, and (when there was nothing else for

it) amazing dash and energy, to drag the game out of danger and turn the tables on their opponents.

But possibly an even better illustration was provided when the United States sent her magnificent trio of champions south to recover the long-lost Davis Cup. There was a day of days when Norman Brookes, of Australia, went out to face the great McLoughlin, of America, and such a battle resulted as probably never was seen on any court in the world before. The big American, the incarnation of vitality and dash, radiating his superabundant energy from every part of him with every move he made, played the game of his life. And such a game! His amazing cleverness, his staggering swiftness and brilliancy so dazzled the eyes of all assembled, friend and foe alike, that they beheld the wonderful display as though fascinated. Every stroke brought forth a storm of cheers, every return an ovation. He was the only man on the court.

Yet it takes two to play tennis, even though one be completely outshone by the other. And at the opposite end of the court, facing this bewildering player, was a lean, gaunt Australian. His tired, disinterested eyes looked out wearily from a face almost dead in its utter lack of expression, and, so far as it was possible to determine, he had no more concern for the result of the game than if he were filling in time with some Miss at a garden-party. Never overreaching, never rushing at things beyond him, never moving a foot unless compelled to, evoking no enthusiasm, receiving no ovation, completely overshadowed and eclipsed by the other, and seemingly content to have it so, and yet—and yet—it was this inert slab of indolence and indifference, and not his

brilliant antagonist, who emerged triumphant from the great ordeal.

And, after all, that dreadful appearance of laziness which so vexes our visitors from other climes is probably far more apparent than real. The eyes may seem half-asleep, but they miss nothing ; the tall figure may droop, but it is not for lack of strength. The man may seem the embodiment of indolence, but so, for that matter, is a panther ; and in both cases it is indolence born of the consciousness of vast reserves of strength and of ability to achieve its purpose, if not without effort, at least without display. Some day in the future a man will arise to call this wisdom. For, after all, is not energy concentrated life? Why, then, expend that priceless treasure where it is not required? None but fools get up steam in a locomotive in order to remove a hatful of gravel.

This, then, was the type of man their eyes beheld in the portable, and they soon discovered that his speech was quite in keeping with the rest of him ; for when he answered the man at the other end of the wire it was in sleepy, drawling tones, with a very decided lisp, and to Scarlett it seemed fitting, in an odd way, that the conversation was concerning 'sleepers.' Altogether he looked more like an overgrown and somewhat supercilious clerk in an office taking advantage of the boss's absence to loaf round and ring up a friend than the head of an army of railway-men working feverishly against time to save their country from a coal famine.

All this time the new arrivals stood in the doorway and waited, with what patience they could command, for the business over the wires to come to an end, and when at length it did the engineer

hung the receiver on the hook and turned with a look of inquiry to his visitors. Smith began to explain, but before he could do so they were interrupted by the entrance of the rouseabout, a short, sturdy man of austere countenance, who stumbled into the office and deposited on the table an armful of letters and packets. The engineer groaned miserably at the sight of them.

'They seem to think we haven't enough to do up here,' he complained bitterly, 'and whenever they are out of a job in town they sit down and write me instructions about nothing, and always finish up, "N.B.—Reply requested by return." The end of it will be,' he added, with mild conviction, 'that things will begin to accumulate at this end.' Then looking after the mailman, who was already outside the door, 'Excuse me, gentlemen. Kitchener! Kitchener!' he called with feeble energy.

Kitchener, evidently much against his inclination, slowly returned, and poked his solemn head through the door.

'Wot is it, Mister Ferguson?' he said.

'There's a coal-train from Korumburra going through here at half-past five in the morning, Kitchener. I'll get outside this little pile of mail before bedtime, and if you're about a little after five, you might look in here, Kitchener, and get the replies aboard that train. There's an ordinary at nine, but there's no reason why we shouldn't catch the other. Don't rise on purpose, Kitchener, but I shall be off down the line at four, and if you are about, it would oblige me greatly.'

The engineer appeared almost exhausted with this long speech, and Kitchener nodded and withdrew. But it was easy to see that he was far from pleased, and, standing by the door, Scarlett

could hear him grumbling as he stumbled off into the night.

"If you're about, Kitchener," he muttered rebelliously—"if you're about, Kitchener!" "Ow very polite we are! It's not "I want you 'ere, an' mind you are 'ere!" Oh, no, for 'e knows jolly well wot I'd say to 'im. No, it's "If you're about, Kitchener!" Same as if I was in the 'abit of roamin' about at five o'clock in the morning! "If you're about, Kitchener!" No doubt I'll be about—the Lord help me if I'm not!—but I'd a darn sight sooner be in me bunk."

Any further remarks he may have made were cut short at this juncture by a piece of fencing-wire which lay across his path. Kitchener, striding viciously on, tripped over it and measured his little length on the ground; but he was not hurt, and arose presently, full of cursing and bitterness, and went on his way.

Meantime the superintendent waved his hand towards a biscuit-box. 'Be seated, gentlemen,' he said, and they seated themselves accordingly; but Smith, who had been with Lord Kitchener in Africa, remarked, with a jerk of his head towards the door—

'Rather a contrast to *the Kitchener!*'

'Think so?' the engineer replied, with real or affected surprise. 'I understood there was a very striking likeness; in fact, that's why he is called Kitchener. Some one remarked upon the great resemblance when first he came here, and from that time he has been called Lord Kitchener. Nobody knows him by any other name, and, in fact, he won't answer to any other, so he gets nothing else. But is there anything I can do for you, gentlemen?' he concluded, his eyes resting a moment on the pile of mail matter that awaited him.

Smith caught the glance, and himself a man of business to his finger-tips, needed no further hint as to the value of time. In a few words he explained who and what they were, and what it was they required. To his infinite relief he found the superintendent, if not enthusiastic, at least courteous, and if a little sceptical as to the result, quite sympathetic with the object in view, and willing to do all in his power to help. He would set apart a truck for their outfit, and give instructions that it be loaded and left at the seventeen-mile, where, upon his advice, Smith determined to make the headquarters of his camp.

' You are taking charge of the work yourself, Mr. Smith, I presume? ' he concluded, noting with approval the tall figure and brisk business ways of the General.

' No,' Smith returned reluctantly, ' I'm not. Mr. Scarlett here is to take charge.'

The superintendent raised his eyebrows the least bit in the world as he turned his eyes upon the blushing Scarlett, and it was not difficult to analyse his thoughts. Then the corners of his mouth twitched in response to inward amusement as he pictured this nervous, ladylike young man in the midst of a Sunday ' two-up ' school trying to turn the men from the error of their ways. However, there was nothing but encouragement in his voice when next he spoke.

' Well, Mr. Scarlett,' he observed, with a deep and wide yawn, ' you don't look exactly the kind of man to handle navvies and shanty-keepers. But that remains to be seen, and, anyhow, I wish you luck. We've had bad weather, and bottomless pits, and flooded rivers, and the Lord only knows what else to fight on this line, but with the single exception of the office in town all these things

together have not delayed me one-half so much as those confounded shanties, and if you can do anything to lessen their influence I'll be eternally grateful to you.'

This long speech was the climax, for, having delivered it, the engineer sank back exhausted in his chair and spoke no more. He nodded wearily to the thanks and farewells of the others, but speech seemed beyond him, and they left him to his pipe and his mail.

But for all his languor and apparent indifference no man was ever in more deadly earnest about his work than Ferguson. He had fought his way up to his present position without friends or influence, the while looking for an opportunity to get his foot on the ladder which led to the top. The opportunity came with the almost impossible task of building this railway in the space of time allowed, and he had reached for it with both hands. If he succeeded, his future was safe ; if he failed —well—but he was so determined to succeed that he made no preparations for failure.

Of these things Scarlett was ignorant, of course, which is rather a pity, for the knowledge that he was not the only man who was to sink or swim by his work on this line would have cheered him greatly.

CHAPTER VIII

THE 'OLD BULL AND BUSH'

THE Old Bull and Bush Hotel was enjoying unprecedented prosperity. A few short months ago it was as dull and dead as only a bush public-house can be, but the building of the railway had brought hundreds of men to its doors, and having nowhere else to go when the work of the day was done, they went inside and gave themselves up to such as it afforded ; that is to say, they drank great quantities of a vile kind of beer which they did not want, and parted with their hard-earned money which they did want, and sent far less than was due to their expectant wives and needy children, reducing them to rags and penury, the while they decked the landlord's wife in silks and furs. Incidentally, they parted with much self-respect in consequence of this, and being conscious of the fact, endeavoured to regain it by the process of flinging good money after bad.

The General and his companions, after their interview with the superintendent, made their way to the place where these odd things were done, and as they drew near were duly impressed with what was taking place.

Every door and window stood wide open, and the garish light, streaming out from within, shone blatantly on the white dust of the roadway. The

place was full of men, every one of whom seemed to be talking, laughing, singing, or swearing. Such a medley and mixture of sound Scarlett had never heard, and he shivered in the hot night as they drew near. From the billiard-room came the sharp click of the ivory balls breaking through the babel of tongues. From the interior of the house came the sound of music and the tramping of heavy feet in a dance, while from the bar there came the clink of glasses and the song of the drinkards, interspersed with snatches of argument, where a knot of beer-inspired politicians discussed the coming election and settled the destiny of the country.

As they approached, some one in a melancholy voice was droning out—

'In the shade of the ole apple-tree,
The love in your eyes I could see,
'Twas your voice that I 'eard—'

'Oh, shut up! ' a tired voice, evidently that of the publican, interjected wearily. Then the politicians prevailed.

'She wins! she wins! ' a strident voice was saying; 'labour wins, I tell you, and w'en she does, God 'elp the fat man! Once labour gets 'old of the reins—'

'I could 'ear the dull 'um of the bee
In the blossom w'en you said to me—'

'Look 'ere, Harry, if you don't shut up your jaw you'll not get another beer to-night. You're something sickenin'. You've been singing about that blasted apple-tree ever since you come 'ere this morning, an'—'

'Wages will go up with a bump, and the working-man——'

'I seen 'im once goin' aboard a boat for Tasmania, and Jimmy Mulcahey says to me, "There's General Booth," 'e says; "old man, ain't 'e?" An' I 'ad a look at 'im, and I says, "Many a man's lived longer'n 'im, Jimmy, that's 'ad to work for 'e'es livin', and besides——"'

'They think they know a darn lot, but Billy Hughes knows as much as any of 'em. He'll go through 'em like a packet of——'

'With a 'eart that is true,
I'll be waiting for you-oo-oo——'

'There, that finishes it; not another drop do you get to-night, not if your tongue was hanging out a chain, and you was to offer me pearls and diamonds for it.'

And so on *ad infinitum—ad nauseam.*

'Well, that's the kind of material you've got to work on,' the General remarked to Scarlett as he turned away, 'and it's not very promising. Still,' he added with a touch of sympathy as he noticed the pale face of his lieutenant, 'they will turn out better than they look at first sight. Let's go and see if we can get anything to eat, and arrange about to-night.'

Going along the side of the house, they entered a passage which led by the back of the bar, and by that room incidental to every Australian public-house, and known as the 'bar-parlour.' In some places it is snug and cosy enough, but in the majority it is miserable and cheerless to a degree. This was one of the latter type, but to-night what it lacked in comfort it made up in animation. It was full of men—young men mostly, dressed in

trousers and shirt, with coloured handkerchiefs about their necks and broad-brimmed hats pushed back on their heads. One of them sat upon a barrel with his legs crossed, playing an accordion, and about half a dozen couples, all of them men, were waltzing heavily around the room. Conspicuous among the dancers was a coal-black negro and a ruddy-faced Irishman, and upon these two the eyes of the spectators were fixed, though the bulk of them were doubled up with laughter.

The negro was of the graver sort, and took the matter very seriously. His precision, poise, correctness, and general deportment would have befitted an elderly duke at a Court function, while the fashion in which the Irishman imitated and played up to him was ridiculously funny, and worthy of Dan Barry at his best.

'Hould on, Bland ! Hould on ! Shtop it now,' a rich voice broke in—' shtop it now ; can't you see we're all bustin' our boilers wid laughin'? Rudolph, you black devil, if you don't give over Oi'll have you up under the Whoite Australia Act.'

But it was no use ; Rudolph went on rapturously, oblivious to the demands made upon him. However, the Irishman jerked his head round and begged for 'foive minutes more of Paradoise.' But it was not to be, for the musician at that juncture dropped his accordion on the floor, and fell off beside it, and the dance came to an end.

'Come on,' Smith said, turning away, 'we'd better get out of this.'

For a time neither of his companions acceded to the request. Scarlett was gazing on the scene before him as though fascinated, while old Anderson's dull eye, incited by the generous spirituous atmosphere, flashed brightly, and a very few minutes more would have seen him out of hand and

taking his fill at the bar, though fifty Smiths endeavoured to dissuade him.

'Come on,' the General said again, 'and let us see if we can get anything to eat, and what chance there is of a bed.'

His voice broke the spell which bound Scarlett, and at the same time laid Anderson's vaulting ambition in the dust. Scarlett, once awake, was glad to get away, but Anderson moved reluctantly —this sort of thing was after his own heart.

Making their way along the passage towards the rear of the building, they presently came upon a dining-room with tables decently spread, but nowhere could they see anything to eat, neither could they, though they searched ever so diligently, discover any one about who could provide for their wants, so there was nothing for it but to go back and hunt up the landlord, which they accordingly did.

Leaving Scarlett and Anderson outside, Smith pushed his way into the bar, and bluntly asked if there was any prospect of tea.

'No hope, my son,' the publican replied. 'The missus and the cook and everybody belonging to 'em have gone to bed. There's plenty to do 'ere, mister, with all these men to look after. You 'ave to keep your fingers out of your mouth all right, and w'en night-time comes, the women don't waste any time getting to bed.'

'Hum! Well, is there any chance of a room?'

'I don't know about a room, mister,' he responded presently, 'but I think I could find you a bed.'

'Any chance of three beds?'

'Three! Now you're asking for miracles; but,' he added, 'it so 'appens that I've got that miracle. Three of the chaps that were staying

'ere got the bullet to-day, an' cleared out by the evening train, an' if you all camp in one room, I can manage it right enough.'

Smith's gorge rose at the idea of having to share a room with the grimy Anderson, but as there seemed no other way out of the difficulty, he was compelled at last to agree.

'Well, let's have a look at it,' he said, and the landlord, after casting an anxious eye across the counter, and carefully locking his till, headed the little procession down the passage and into a room on the right. To the General's relief, it was fairly large, and of the three beds, one was behind the door, while the other two were close against a window which opened out on to the veranda.

'This will do,' he said at once, and flinging his swag on one of the beds near the window, he motioned Scarlett to take the other, so Anderson had perforce to take what was left, and consequently would be kept at a safe distance.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH JOHN SCARLETT ARGUES A KNOTTY PROBLEM

SMITH turned in at once, and Anderson prepared to follow his example, but Scarlett sat moodily on the side of his bed in serious thought. He had reached another cross-road, and was trying his best to find reasons why he should not take the way which seemed for the moment the only right way.

When he came into the bedroom he was thanking God that the ordeal, for that day at least, was over, and was about to undress himself, when a voice (whether of heaven or hell he was unable so far to determine) had said—

‘Go back and mingle with the men. Go into the bar-parlour, and the bar, and the billiard-room, and chum up with them.’

It is not over-stating the truth to say that Scarlett’s soul recoiled in horror at the bare suggestion. The wild, rough character of the men he had seen, together with the surroundings of the place, positively frightened him, and he flinched from the ordeal as a sufferer from the surgeon’s knife. How to approach them, suppose he did go? That was the question. They were all so foreign to him. What could he say? What could he do? Nevertheless, he told himself, he

would go if he were sure it was the right thing to do. But was it right? Was it not, after all, merely a temptation from the devil to make himself ridiculous? Satan has a way of appearing as an angel of light—that was Scripture, and possibly now. . . . Anyhow, one needed to try the spirits whether they be of God; he had read that somewhere lately—in the Bible, too. One should not do a thing merely because the devil said, ‘ You are not game to do it.’

He remembered a good, sincere soul who made herself the gazing-block of the city for weeks by wearing on her breast a great placard, on which was written, ‘ The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.’ Scarlett recalled the sequel with approval. A well-known minister, whose righteous soul, as Lot’s in Sodom, had been vexed from day to day by this unseemly spectacle, planted himself before her in the block and begged to know why she wore ‘ that plaster ’ on her breast?

‘ Because the devil told me I was not game,’ she replied with unction.

‘ Oh ! ’ the preacher rejoined, also with unction, ‘ is that the reason ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Well,’ he demanded, ‘ if the devil told you you were not game to stand on your head here in the street, would you do that too ? ’

Whereupon the lady fled in wrath and indignation ; but evidently the shaft went home, for when she next appeared in public the objectionable placard had gone.

No, Scarlett reasoned, there was no sense in doing heroic things simply because the devil said one was not game. The Lord was a God of order and sense, and had given us reason in order that we might use it, and there would be

neither sense nor reason in going into a bear-garden such as the bar or the billiard-room. He would be far more likely to fling his influence away for ever than do an atom of good. Obviously the sensible thing to do was to go to bed and have a good sleep ; he would probably need all he could get before the next day was over. Yes, he would dismiss the thought from his mind and go to bed.

Scarlett's decision was reached amid an increasing pandemonium in the other end of the house. For some time, too, his thoughts had been distracted by sounds of quarrelling in the room across the passage, where a number of men were gambling over cards. Their voices now rose to a shout. Evidently one was accused of cheating.

‘ You did ! ’

‘ I didn’t ! ’

‘ I tell you you did ! ’

‘ And I tell you you’re a . . . liar ! ’

Mr. Dickens has a remark somewhere concerning the singular persistency with which the expression ‘ never mind ’ obtrudes itself into quarrels between men.

‘ Who are you ? ’

‘ Never mind.’

‘ What has it got to do with you ? ’

‘ Never mind.’

‘ Are you the lady’s husband, sir ? ’

‘ Never mind, sir.’

And so on.

Had Dickens lived to-day he would probably have noted another expression which has a singular way of not only obtruding itself into quarrels, but provoking combat. The expression in question is that just recorded as having been uttered by one of the parties to the dispute described above—

' You're a liar ! ' You may call a man a waster, a bounder, a rotter, a scallywag, drunkard, or beast ; call him what you will, and he may remain cool and unaffected, but call him a liar, and he is bound by every code of honour known to man to ram it down your throat, or else retire in confusion and disgrace.

In this case the taunt had its usual effect. The table went over with a crash, there was a wild rush round the room, the sound of heavy blows, and then a prolonged scuffle, while the combatants swayed about, locked together in a deadly embrace. Finally they crashed down together in a corner. Then came a storm of oaths and threats, followed by resounding bumps, which suggested that one had the other by the throat and was knocking his brains out on the floor.

' Hear those wretches ? ' Smith cried, raising himself up in bed. ' They must be murdering some one.'

However, the scuffle ended, as it began, with mutual recriminations, and both Smith and Scarlett breathed more freely. Anderson was already snoring, and Smith, who had been reading his customary chapter, laid the Bible aside and yawned.

' Just a drunken row,' he said ; ' no use going out. But aren't you going to bed to-night, Scarlett ? ' he added.

' Yes,' Scarlett replied, standing on his feet, his mind suddenly made up on the ruins of his logic. ' Yes, I'm going to bed ; but, first, I'm going outside a bit.' And before Smith had waked sufficiently to express his surprise, his lieutenant was through the door and halfway down the passage.

But let it not be supposed that, because he was in a hurry, he was any less fearful, or in the

least eager to go. The plain truth is, now that he had reached a decision, he was afraid to give himself time to reflect upon it. He had shut his eyes, so to speak, and jumped.

CHAPTER X

THE BABYLONIANS

SCARLETT resolved to take the billiard-room first, thinking that in all probability the most sober of the men would be there. He would begin in the easiest place, he told himself, and work through the bar parlour to the bar, where the worst of the men would probably be assembled. If the whole business were, as his reason suggested, a piece of madness, there would at least be method in his madness.

Scarlett had some idea of entering the billiard-room quietly and unnoticed, but he was so eager to keep ahead of his fickle resolution that he burst through the door, and precipitated himself into the midst of the men about it so violently that the whole crowd rose in alarm, and every possible eye was turned upon him. To make matters worse, not noticing that the floor of the billiard-room was raised some inches higher than that of the passage, he tripped over it, and, shooting suddenly forward, charged violently into the rear of one of the players, a tall, dark man who was labouring with the long "rest" to negotiate a —to him—rather difficult shot. Scarlett struck him squarely and with such force that the man was flung forward on the table. The "rest" and

cue went flying half across the room, while the balls were scattered in all directions.

'Ere ! Wot the . . . is this ? ' the tall man demanded furiously as he scrambled to his feet, amid shouts of laughter, and wheeled round to confront his assailant. 'Wot the . . . do you mean by it, aigh? ' he repeated in challenging tones, towering over the innocent cause of his confusion.

'I'm very sorry—I beg your pardon,' the miserable Scarlett began ; 'I didn't know about the doorstep, and tripped over it. I——'

'Well, why the . . . couldn't you look where you were going? You darn near made me smash the lamps, and, any'ow, you spoilt my shot—just as I was gettin' me eye in, too ! ' he added in aggrieved tones. 'I was makin' a break.'

'Ow many did you 'ave, Bill? ' a curly-headed half-caste inquired in bantering tones.

'Seven ! ' Bill replied proudly, turning to confront his questioner.

'No fear ! '

'I tell you I did ; I made a cannon and potted Mick and got in off the red. Didn't I, Mick? '

Mick, who was leaning on his cue, removed his pipe from his mouth to make way for speech and replied—

'S right.'

The dark man, whom Scarlett presently heard the others addressing by the name of George, seemed filled with admiration.

'Seven ! ' he repeated with surprise. 'My word, Bill ! you're gettin' on. You'll be goin' after George Grey directly.'

Bill made no reply to this compliment, but Scarlett gathered from his looks that he considered it not unlikely that he would, and when he did

George Grey would have to look out for himself. Then followed an argument as to the positions of the balls on the table before the interruption came, and by the time it was finished and play resumed Scarlett's share in the occurrence was, if not forgiven, at all events forgotten by the chief sufferer in it.

However, when the tension wrought up by Bill's endeavour to continue his break came to an end by his missing the ball altogether, the onlookers turned to Scarlett to see what they could make of him, and a fair-haired, affable German, a runaway fireman from one of the Norddeutscher Lloyds, was the first to address him.

'Dot scharge dot you make agross der deeck into Bill's stern yoost safe him from vinning a gannon,' he observed weightily.

Again Scarlett professed his profound regret, but said no more. The German looked to him to continue the conversation, and Scarlett would have given much to oblige him, but try as he would he could think of nothing to say. He tried to make up for his silence by smiling knowingly. But the smile, being unreal, was a failure, and only made him look foolish.

'Come far to-day?' This from another of the crowd.

'Melbourne,' Scarlett replied. The others waited expectantly for further information; but it was no use, his powers of speech were bogged, and could neither be led nor driven any farther. The atmosphere was so abruptly different to that he was used to that his brain froze, and thinking was an impossibility.

There are people who act upon our spirits as the sun acts upon the snow in the springtime: they warm us through and through, they sound

the great deeps of our mind, wake the currents of our imagination, and set our thoughts running like a mountain stream in the sunlight, until we, who seem so commonplace, unimaginative, and dull, presently find ourselves talking freely, authoritatively, and, possibly, brilliantly, Apt stories, long forgotten, come to us unsought ; wise thoughts and principles that we have long felt after but could never quite define, flash through our speech as perfectly conceived and expressed as though written down and learnt by heart. Light, playful humour, of which we scarcely hoped ourselves capable, sparkles warmly in the glowing tide. A certain largeness of vision, a wealth and variety of expression, is suddenly at our complete command, and we feel that for once we are able to manifest our true selves to the world.

But, alas ! it is only a step from this enchanted land of free speech to another where all is changed. This is the land of the Babylonians, where we sit perforce by the river of conversation, and hang our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof, so to speak, for sheer inability to use them in present company. Hearts frozen, brains numb, the fires of imagination cold, and speech of any worthy kind utterly impossible. Silence is dross and verdigris ; speech, like Solomon's virtuous woman, is far above rubies, and we are ready to sell our souls almost to command it ; but though a man give all that he hath for speech, yet is it utterly condemned. It is the old story : ' How shall we sing the Lord's song '—or any song, for that matter—' in a strange land ? '

And it was into this land of the tongue-tied that John Scarlett had entered so promiscuously, yet withal so ingloriously, through the door of the

billiard-room, and a strange land he found it to be. Strange men, for all the bulk of them were his fellow-countrymen, and sprang from the same stock as himself. Strange speech, though its roots were down in Alfred's English, like his own. Strange atmosphere, though common as man himself wherever civilisation stands face to face with the wilderness and solitary way. So it was small wonder that Scarlett felt strange and out of place. And no man can either sing or preach or talk, nor be his best in any direction whatever, when feeling strange and out of place. So no one will be surprised to learn that, under these circumstances, Scarlett felt like a fool, acted as he felt, and looked as he acted ; and the Babylonians, presently seeing what manner of man he appeared to be, took him at his own valuation and treated him accordingly.

'Rather dismal sort of bloke, ain't 'e?' one remarked, turning to the crowd and indicating Scarlett with the stem of his pipe.

'Well, no,' a fat, red-faced man replied, speaking for the rest. 'To my mind, 'e's not wot you would call dismal so much as lively.'

Scarlett burned all over, and inwardly cursed himself for ever venturing into the room, and would have fled from it had he been able to make up his mind ; but his was one of those minds which take a lot of making up, and while he hesitated further humiliation came upon him. The number of the Babylonians was added to by the entrance of one who, by his appearance of overbearing arrogance and truculence, seemed a very Haman amongst them. He was very big, three parts drunk, and out for argument or fight as the case might be. Seeing Scarlett the centre of a knot of men, his gorge rose as that of Haman

at sight of old Mordecai sitting meekly by the palace gate.

'Low me to inter—joice myself,' he said with polite sarcasm, lowering his head and lurching heavily forward by way of a bow. 'I—I wish you—know me—in my profesh—nal—capacity—as—navvy blacksmith,' with great emphasis on the 'navvy.'

Scarlett bowed in turn, and expressed himself as being very happy to meet him, which expression must needs be taken as a piece of polite formality rather than actual truth; for, as a matter of fact, he was horrified to meet him. Haman, however, took him graciously at his word, and bowed in such regal fashion that the weight of it carried him forward into Scarlett's arms, and Scarlett, for the second time, into the rear of the tall billiardist, who happened at the moment to be chalking his cue.

'Ere ! I say !' he shouted wrathfully, 'wot the Hanover are you up to? You again !' he roared as he caught sight of Scarlett. 'Look 'ere, me noble, if you're lookin' for bash, say so, an' put 'em up, an' I'm your Moses ; but no more of this 'ere chargin' a man w'en 'is back's turned.'

'It wasn't his fault, Bill,' one of the others considerately explained. 'Admiral Togo 'ad 'im on the run, an' 'e couldn't 'elp 'imself.'

Bill muttered something about it being a 'darned rummy thing it should 'appen twice in one night.' But seeing Scarlett in the embrace of the other, he could not but believe it, and turned again to the table.

Scarlett, freeing himself with some difficulty, crossed the floor and sat down by the wall, hoping to be left alone ; but, alas ! it was not to be.

Haman followed and stood swaying before him in a way which poor Scarlett found particularly trying. The Babylonians gathered about expectantly, for the navvy blacksmith was well known, and was not nicknamed Togo for nothing.

'You're a man of the world,' he remarked sagely, eyeing his victim with a kind of lack-lustre intentness. 'I can tell that by—your whiskers.'

A shout of laughter followed, and Scarlett's bare cheeks flamed till they resembled his name.

'I know you, too—now I come to—think of it,' the navvy blacksmith went on with assurance. 'You're an embezzler.' Then, confidently : 'Are you up 'ere—dodgin' 'em?'

Scarlett would have given worlds to have been able to make a cutting reply, but the words were not forthcoming ; and Haman, assuming an air of great gravity and solicitude, went on solemnly—

'My brother—I'm afraid you're on the downward path—which leadeth to—the—bottom. Tell me,' he added, steadying himself with difficulty, 'do you ever think of—the—"ereafter?"'

He waited for a reply, and Scarlett answered woodenly—

'I'm always thinking about it.'

'Then 'ow is it,' the other demanded severely, 'that I find you in sich company, an' drunk in a public-'ouse?'

Scarlett began a denial of the soft impeachment, but it would not do.

'My brother,' the other said, as one who spoke more in sorrow than in anger, "'ow can you say so—in the presence of theshe 'ere witnesses?'

There was no reply to this ; and, after waiting a little, he went on, with the air of a 'penitent form' sergeant in a Salvation Army meeting—

'"Ow is it with your internal soul?"'

It is probable Scarlett's reply to this facer would have been as wooden as that given to the former question, had he not been saved the necessity of replying at all by the entrance at that juncture of the landlord, shouting—

‘ Show's over, chaps ! Shut-up time ! ’

Haman laid his hand restrainingly on Scarlett's shoulder.

‘ So-long, young man,’ he said, ‘ so-long—an,’ pointing to the ceiling, ‘ if we never meet again below—I'll meet—you—upper-bove.’

And then, when it was altogether too late, did Scarlett's blood thaw, and his tongue became unloosed, and restraint and nervousness break from him. Like the prodigal in the other far country, he suddenly came to himself, and looking his tormentor squarely in the eyes and lifting up his voice like a trumpet, he shouted, ‘ God forbid ! ’ And, rising up in his wrath, he gave the chief of the Babylonians a push which sent him sprawling on his back on the floor, and the reign of the Son of Hammedatha was at an end as completely as though he had been hanged upon a gallows sixty cubits high.

Then was poor Mordecai's mouth filled with laughter, in which the Babylonians joined ; and with a perfectly careless ‘ Good-night, chaps,’ he strode out of the room, with his head high in the air and his chest sticking out like that of a Highland piper.

Haman recovered his feet with the assistance of Bill and the landlord, and expressed the feelings of more than himself when he said slowly and deliberately—

‘ Well—I'll—be—d—d ! ’

And the German fireman, suddenly inspired, responded—

'Id vosh quide likely dot you vill.'

Unquestionably, Scarlett had cut a poor figure amongst the navvies up to the last moment of his stay in the room, and no one realised it half so well as himself. Yet somehow in that last instant he had contrived to get back all he had lost and something more, and being fully conscious of the fact, he returned to his room, as in other days his antitypes to Canaan, his mouth filled with laughter and his tongue with singing. The Lord had done great things for him, whereof he was glad.

Smith and Anderson were both in the land of dreams. Outside groups of men made their uproarious way to their different camps, while drunken Harry sat by the wayside in the pure moonlight, singing about the old apple-tree. But John Scarlett knelt by his bed and gave thanks to God, and then, having divested himself of his clothes, he laid him down in peace and slept, and his sleep was sweet unto him. For, after all, there is no such incentive to good, honest sleep as the sense of disagreeable duty done.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE SEVENTEEN MILE

IT was evening in the Seventeen Mile Camp.

Henderson's engine, followed by a long rake of trucks with O'Brien's gang of 'gallopers out' aboard, had just rattled in to the points where the branch line runs off to the ballast pits. Old Kennedy's asthmatic engine stood panting almost head to head with the other, having brought back Rook's gang of platelayers from somewhere out towards the Twenty Mile. Andy Callander's gang from the ballast-pits hard by were pushing their way in through the scrub and undergrowth, shouting as they came, and all was life and animation.

All day long the camp had slumbered in the hot sunlight, silent and empty save for the rattle of dishes in the boarding-houses, where the proprietors were washing up after breakfast or busy preparing for tea, save also to-day for the ring of hammers, where the uprights of a mysterious building were rising on the one bit of clear land in the whole locality.

'Hello! What the Hanover's this?' Fat Jack of the 'gallopers out,' who was in the first truck after the engine, had cried, as he caught sight of the framework and the three figures feverishly working on it, and—

'Hello! What in thunder is this?' old Bob Howitt of the platelayers gang had cried, as he stood up in the leading truck as they swung into the Seventeen Mile on their return, and—

'Hello! What in this, that, or the other thing is this?' scores of others of the various gangs had severally cried, as their eyes were greeted by the unusual sight.

That also was the problem which confronted old Lanigan, the one-armed shanty-keeper, and Big Marsh, who ran the other shanty, which was known felicitously as the 'Blue Pig,' because of the colour of its door. Old Lanigan's was simply the Shanty.

As a rule the men lost no time in getting from the trucks to their tents upon their return from work, for there was plenty to do in the short half-hour which elapsed between now and the ringing of the bullock-bell at the different 'boarding-houses,' which would summon those who boarded to tea.

Those who 'batched' had still more to do. But 'boarders' and 'batchers' alike had water to get for drinking and washing purposes from the square iron tanks which stood by the line; and it was well to get it early, for it had chanced more times than one that the train that was supposed to replenish the supply each day had failed to put in an appearance, and late-comers at the tanks went unwashed of their grime, and were thankful if they could get sufficient to drink. For these reasons the men usually leaped from the trucks as soon as they came to a standstill, and with billies and shovels held aloft, ran with what speed they could to their tents, to come thence a minute later, bucket in hand, to the tanks for water.

But this evening there was none of that. Some

stood up in their trucks, others alighted and joined in various groups, but all alike with eyes fixed on the mysterious building.

What could it be?

Some of the men were of opinion it was a shop starting in opposition to O'Leary, whereof they were glad, for did not O'Leary fleece them most scandalously? Other some, as an old writer would say, wondered if it might be a picture show, or another shanty, but no one was prepared to credit the assertion of one of the boarding-house keepers that it was the Young Men's Christian Association. In any case, what was the Young Men's Christian Association? And who was running it? And what were they going to do?

Upon one point everybody agreed. Whether it was a store, or a boarding-house, or a shanty, or a picture show, or an association, whether Christian or infidel, they were there on 'the make.' It was only 'another blinded scheme for bleedin' the workin' man.' There could be no doubt about that.

The banging of McGinty's bullock-bell, immediately followed by the others in chorus, put an end to these speculations. They would see after tea. The knots dispersed, the buckets presently began to rattle, the sweet, pungent scent of burning gum-leaves rose up. The camp resumed its normal state.

In the meantime the modest triumvirate of newcomers toiled and slaved. Ever since early morning, when the crew of the construction train had tumbled them and their belongings on to the ground beside the track, they had been working against time. It was the General's object to get the tent erected and ready for opening the first night, thinking that if he were on the spot to

take charge and give the work a 'shove off,' so to speak, it might go of itself in Scarlett's hands until he could get some one better fitted to manage it. Hence the speed with which he pushed the work forward. The framework had all been prepared and marked, so that it might easily be identified and fitted into place, and when this was done, it was only a matter of drawing the canvas over and lashing it down, and the building was complete. It seemed exceedingly simple, and only a few hours' work at most, but in the end it proved a long, exacting job. Odd bits of timber had got astray, the markings were frequently misleading, and after toiling incessantly all day long, it was late in the evening before the end came in sight.

By that time the boarding-houses were emptied, and the building was surrounded by a curious, speculative crowd, somewhat inclined to sarcasm at the expense of the amateur carpenters. The remarks made and the suggestions offered were not complimentary, and the General felt that they were rapidly losing prestige, though how to save the situation he could not think. However, chancing to look down from the roof where he was working, he noticed Scarlett rummaging in one of the cases, off which he had torn the lid, and presently fish out some dark object from among the packages.

A minute later the General was startled by a thud beneath him, and ducked his head barely in time to escape the upward rush of a football, which, narrowly missing him, soared aloft through the open space in the roof. Simultaneously there was a roar of delight from a hundred throats, and the crowd, with delighted calls of 'Footer !' 'Footer !' rushed together to take the mark.

Thenceforward there was no more trouble, for every Australian is a footballer, or thinks he is, which in one respect amounts to the same thing. The General nodded approval to his lieutenant.

'Good idea, Scarlett,' he called down to him. To himself he said: 'Well, thank God for a football!' Then as he drew the last bit of canvas to its place, and knotted the last cord, he paused thoughtfully. 'Perhaps, after all,' he muttered, 'Scarlett is not such a fool as he looks.'

Then the boarding-house 'boss' stood beneath him.

'If you want any tea, mister, you better come now; we can't keep it any longer,' he said.

'Just coming,' the General shouted, sliding wearily down. 'I never felt more like tea in my life.'

All was practically ready; the lamps were hung, the long tables were resting on their trestles, the organ was on a little raised platform, and the phonograph unpacked and ready. The books and literature would do to-morrow.

The great bulk of the men were chasing the football with unabated zeal, while the remainder stood about watching them and smoking the pipe of contentment. So the General and his men went to their tea with peace of mind and heart.

The boarding-house was a long, low tent, constructed chiefly of tarpaulins, one end of which was divided off into a kitchen, where the cooking was done. The tables ran the length of the interior, one on either side, and the seats were each constructed of a couple of green, springy saplings, fastened on to stakes driven into the earthen floor. When you sat down they gave and expanded, when you rose up they contracted, and as often as not held you like a man-trap. It took a little

practice to be able to rise without accident, but one soon got into the way of it.

The guests were waited upon by the 'boss' personally, a tall man of ferocious aspect, whose apprenticeship to waiting had seemingly been served in a stable, feeding horses ; for each time he wished to attract his customer's attention he emitted the kind of click of the tongue which a horse recognises as the signal to get up or stand over. However, the meal was none the less enjoyable for these little adjuncts. It consisted of three courses—soup, meat and vegetables, and pudding—and the marvel to the visitors was how it could be done so well, so far from a town, and with such facilities as were at hand. Scarlett was the first to leave.

'Don't hurry,' he said to the others ; 'I'll slip along and see after things. I'm afraid some one may get fiddling with that phonograph, and make a mess of it.'

The others were nothing loath to sit a little longer, and Scarlett disappeared behind the curtain.

CHAPTER XII

JOHN DRAWS FIRST BLOOD

IT was dusk when Scarlett got outside. The sun had gone down beyond the islands of beautiful Westernport Bay, but the western sky was still aflame, and vivid bolts of colour flashed across the world to smite the white faces of the clouds in the east. At another time Scarlett would have strolled away to watch the miracle of splendour, but to-night there was more important work afoot. The signs, at least, were ominous. The football was over, and the only men visible were peering in the door of the tent. Scarlett hurried across—who could tell what devilment they might be up to? The necessity for haste appeared to him so great that he had not time even to become nervous. As he approached he noticed that the lamps were lit, and presently the strains of the organ accompanying a strenuous singer smote upon his ear. The words came to him distinctly—

“Cheer up, Olga,” said the sailor,
“I’ll return to you some day;
By the flowing river Volga,
Hand in hand again we’ll stray.”

Then a stentorian voice broke in, ‘Now then,

boys, all together,' and all together they responded, in a deep roar—

“Good-bye, Olga, my beautiful Olga,
Good-bye, Olga, now don't you cry.
My love, Olga, will last like the Volga,
So dry those pretty eyes of yours,
And kiss me goodbye.”

Scarlett's spirits rose. ‘They are all inside, and they are in a good-humour,’ he said exultingly, ‘and that ought to be half the battle.’

The men about the door were too intent upon what was taking place within to notice Scarlett's approach, so instead of pushing his way in to the front, he went along to the side, and drawing apart the flap of canvas that served as a window, peeped in.

The sight that met his eyes partly cheered and partly terrified him. The place was full of men ; all the seats and even the tables were occupied. The gangways were crowded, and the men stood packed like palings round the walls. All were smoking, and such a haze filled the place that Scarlett had to strain his eyes to see to the farther end. But everybody seemed quite at home, and in the best of humours, and when Scarlett saw it he gave God thanks on the spot.

Seated at the little organ in the corner was a fair, slim man, with a drooping moustache. He had a pipe in his mouth, his sleeves were rolled up above his elbows, and a slouch hat was pushed back from his forehead, but one needed only a glance to see the dregs of culture and refinement all about him. It was evident he was a gentleman, but one of those characters of whom, alas ! we have

66 JOHN DRAWS FIRST BLOOD

all too many, who, starting out with every advantage that culture can give, yet, by reason of some mental twist or disproportion in their make-up, immediately begin to make their way down, and, having got to the bottom, seem content to remain there, enjoying a kind of notoriety amongst their more ignorant fellows.

The Bishop, as he was called, for the reason that his father was said to be an occupant of the English episcopal bench, spoke several languages, sang a song with remarkable taste, and was said to be able to play also, but, hitherto, for lack of opportunity, his powers in that direction were not known. However, had any doubt existed, it would have been dispelled the moment his fingers touched the keys. Whatever his qualifications as a navvy may have been, he had the soul of a musician, and ability to interpret it to others.

But Scarlett had no time to speculate concerning this gentleman before the singer claimed his attention.

He was a tall, awkward man, of serious aspect, who stood upon the platform, posing in the attitude of studied grace favoured by the last generation of bushmen when making a public appearance. He stood with his legs crossed, the left foot bearing his weight, and the toe of the right resting easily and gracefully beside it. His hands were placed in a devil-may-care fashion on either hip, with the elbows stuck out aggressively, while his hat rode rakishly far back on his head. His eyes, into which he had worked an expression intended to be sentimental, were firmly fixed upon the roof, and apparently about to start out of his head. A figure so grotesque Scarlett had never before seen upon a platform, and he looked upon the singer in astonishment. Then the organist

struck the note afresh, and the singer began again in his high-pitched, staggering voice—

'Volga river had been frozen o'er,
Lads and maids on the ice were skating ;
No more vessels could come into shore,
Until the summer came.
Olga by her door was standing
When her sailor reached her side ;
Overland from sea he'd travelled,
With his savings for his bride.'

He finished with a spasmodic 'Chorus !' whereat the organist bent over the instrument and fairly pumped the music out, while every man removed his pipe and yelled—

' "Good-bye, Olga, my beautiful Olga,
Good-bye, Olga, now don't you cry-i.
My love, Olga, will last like the Volga,
So dry those pretty little eyes of yours,
And kiss me good-bye."

' Hen-core ! Hen-core ! Beef it out again, Jerry ! ' the men shouted enthusiastically, though more in sarcasm than earnestness, for Jerry was one of the jokes of the camp. But it was in vain. The strain of standing so long on one leg was too great, and the artist declined.

' I can't sing any more to-night, blokes,' he said pathetically ; ' I'm blown out.' And he stepped down from the platform at the same moment that Scarlett, screwing his courage to the sticking-point, raised the flap of the tent which served as a door at the back, and stepped on it. There was a momentary hush at the sight of him, and the organist, glancing round, started visibly when he

saw who it was, and then, concentrating his attention suddenly on the keys of the organ, he stroked his silky moustache and awaited developments.

There was silence, but with nothing of awkwardness about it. The men were simply amused, expectant, while with pipes all going they waited curiously for Scarlett to speak. Scarlett had scarcely realised that he was to speak. Seized outside with a sudden spasm of fear, he had burst into the tent thus precipitately to prevent himself running away altogether, but without giving a moment's thought to what he might have to say ; and once inside, and the necessity paramount, the obvious thing happened : his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, his eyes started out of his head, and thought and speech were alike impossible. He had strayed once more, it would seem, into the land of the Babylonians.

But speak he must, and at length in a strange, far-away kind of voice, he began—

‘Ladies and gentlemen—’

But got no farther. The men, for the most part, removed their pipes, looked at each other with eyebrows raised inquisitorily, as who said, ‘Fancy him pulling *our* legs ! ’ Finally they broke into a roar of laughter. Scarlett was too bewildered to know what he had said, and too much upset at its reception to think back and find out, and his pale face turned from pale to red ; for what to do, or what to say next, he could not conceive.

However, the necessity for taking the initiative was saved him by a wild, bushrangerish type of man with whiskers white as mistletoe, who got down from the table on which he had been seated, and with his hand upon his heart, bowed to Scarlett profoundly.

'Meanin' me, of course?' he said unctuously.

'You look out, Sam, you can't take no rises out of him!' the warning voice of a newcomer called out from the crowd. But the warning passed unheeded, and the man with the mistletoe beard went on bowing and smirking. As for Scarlett, he stood staring at the bowing figure before him, and compassed heaven and earth to understand what it meant.

'Meaning you? What? How do you mean?' he demanded presently.

Sam began to explain, when the warning voice broke in again—

'Don't you 'ave no truck with 'im, Sam. 'E'll take you down, same as 'e did Admiral Togo.'

But again the warning passed unheeded. Sam looked at Scarlett's frightened face and saw nothing to alarm him.

'Was it my general appearance, or jist on account of my blushes?' he asked in a simpering fashion.

Scarlett was mystified. What could the man mean? His very density was his salvation, for the joke was going flat, and the navvy tried again, though with less confidence.

'Didn't you say I was a perfect lady?' he ventured.

Even then no glimmering of his meaning broke upon Scarlett's mind, and he answered the question literally, baldly—

'I'm sure I didn't. You are no lady.'

Charles Dickens in the inimitable 'Pickwick' tells how Mr. Tracy Tupman, that stout and impossible gentleman, going out shooting for the first time in his life, raised his gun when he saw the others raising theirs, and firmly shutting his

eyes, fired at random into the air, and an unfortunate bird, getting in the line of fire, fell wounded at his feet. The admiring sportsmen who had witnessed this achievement at once gathered round Mr. Tupman with their congratulations, and, notwithstanding his protests, hailed him as an old hand at the game and a deadly marksman. 'It is not,' says Dickens, 'the only reputation that has been acquired so easily, nor are such fortunate circumstances confined to partridge-shooting.'

Nor are they ; for that reputation for being a dry kind of humorist which John Scarlett enjoyed to the last day of his stay at the Seventeen Mile was gained in like manner, and was due entirely to his wooden failure to see his own joke. But, possibly, like Barrie's humorist, he held that a man cannot be expected to make a joke and see it too.

He had not the remotest idea why the men cheered him so lustily, and when Ned Kelly retired abashed he was dumbfounded. Had he been able to hear the man who created the disturbance in the back of the tent, he might have been enlightened ; certainly he would have been encouraged.

'What did I tell you?' that gentleman yelled excitedly to those around. 'That's 'im ! That's wot 'e done last night. 'E come bummin' into the billiard-room in a terrible hurry, just like 'e come in 'ere now, an' 'e bumped Bill McGrar clean over the table, an' Bill got up an' froze on to 'im somethink awful, an' 'e looked such a darn fool then that they all began pullin' 'ees leg—even German Charlie 'ad a go at 'im, an' 'e sat there all night, with them soakin' it into 'im like that, an' at last 'e just got up, cool as a waterbag,

knocked Admiral Togo kickin', says "Good-night, chaps," an' out 'e goes. Oh, 'e's a take-down all right.'

And all things considered, the camp allowed generally that he must be.

CHAPTER XIII

' BATING THE DIVIL '

MEANWHILE the laughter and cheering had given Scarlett a breathing space, and had put him more at his ease. For some reason which he could not understand popular feeling seemed to be running strongly in his favour, and he determined to take advantage of it. He beckoned for silence, and when the man at the back had delivered his soul he got it.

' Men,' he began, ' I suppose you are all wondering what this little show of ours means and what we're doing in this camp. Well, we're the Young Men's Christian Association, and we've come out to try and brighten things up a bit. People are always talking about the gulf between the Church and labour, and making out that Churches care only for the rich, and not for the working people.' (A voice, ' So they do ! ') Scarlett, hotly : ' They don't ! Most of the Churches are made up of working people, and for one rich man in the Church there are a thousand poor ones. I wish to God we had a few more of the rich ones ! If we had, we could do a lot more for the poor. Anyway, you never hear of a Church making a special effort to reach the rich, but we're always starting a new campaign to help the poor. The trouble is to know how.

‘ Well, this is another effort to solve the problem, and it’s sincere. We are not on the make. We don’t want money. There are a few Christian men in Melbourne who have a bit of money, and they are standing behind the Association and paying for this, so we don’t want your money, but we do want *you*. We’ve got about everything we could think of to make this place bright and comfortable, and we’re going to try and make it a social centre for the camp, and I hope you’ll come and use it. That’s about all, I think,’ he concluded reflectively, ‘ except one thing. The Y.M.C.A. is not a denominational business, and we’re not here on behalf of any denomination in particular, but we are here in the name of Jesus Christ to do all the good we can. We believe in having a bit of fun and a good time, but first and last, top and bottom, this thing is religious.’

Scarlett finished, amazed at his own fluency. Smith had arrived outside the tent at the beginning of the speech, and, peering through the window, had listened at first with fear and trembling, but presently with undisguised amazement as the speaker went on. He was never more surprised in his life, for, practised speaker though he was, he knew he could not have stated the position better himself. Indeed, there was a certain directness and bluntness according well with the character of the audience which he felt he could not have equalled, and, pushing through the crowd, he made his way to Scarlett’s side and clapped him on the back.

‘ Splendid, old man ! ’ he said heartily. ‘ God helped you. You’ve got ‘em on a line. Now hold on to them.’

The gratified Scarlett, feeling capable now of tackling anything under the sun, turned to the

phonograph, and presently that useful instrument was delighting everybody with the story of the attainments of 'Mary, the housemaid.'

'What it was that Mary did, Mary didn't know,
But everywhere that Mary went the men were sure to go;
If she sent them all away, back they came again—
Mary was a magnet for the men, men, men.'

From that time there was no more trouble. When 'Mary' was finished a repetition was demanded, and when it was given there were calls from all parts to know whether he had this record or that; and when one of those asked for happened to be amongst the hundred or so Scarlett had with him, the pride of the man who had called for it was very great, and several were in this way won over to the side of the Association for ever. Later on, however, there was a call for a change in the programme. They would have a song, and a demand arose for 'Paddy Roberts.'

In response a ruddy-faced mixture of an Irish-Welshman presently ascended the platform, and, the Bishop playing the accompaniment on the organ, sang the old-time bush favourite, 'Kitty Wells.' The chorus, as all the world knows, has a great swing in it, and all present sang with the full strength of their lusty lungs. Thenceforward song and phonograph alternated for the rest of the evening, and all seemed to enjoy themselves thoroughly. At length Scarlett called for silence.

'It's ten o'clock, men,' he said, 'and ordinarily this place will close at ten, but I'm going to give you something good to go home with.'

He pressed the lever, and in response came the sweetest and most human of all our hymns, 'Abide with me.' The record was especially good, and

the effect was striking. Every trace of frivolity vanished at once. Some removed their hats, and, without exception, they listened reverently.

When the second verse began many commenced to hum the tune, softly and shyly at first, but presently with greater confidence as the words, long forgotten, came back to them. It was evident the hymn had struck a tender chord. There was no clapping when it finished, but the memories awakened and the deep impression made were apparent on many a rugged face.

All was over then for the night, but the men seemed loath to leave and nobody moved. Scarlett waited, undecided how to act, and Smith watched with keen interest to see how he would act in the novel situation that had arisen. Just what Scarlett would have done it is difficult to say, but the necessity for doing anything was saved him by the least promising-looking man in the place. He had the aspect of a pirate. This gentleman broke the silence by asking—

‘I say, Ganger, suppose we ‘ave that last verse over again? It went to the spot like a—like a pint of beer; not meanin’ that exactly,’ he added hastily, apparently seeing a slight incongruity in the figure, ‘but it’s a long time since some of us ‘ave heard it, and we’ve pretty near forgot the words.’

There was a murmur of approval, and Scarlett gladly complied. He went farther, and recited the verse for them; but before he could do anything more the man at the organ suddenly bent forward and played the air over with the practised hand of one long familiar with it, then, striking the note, he led them in the grand old words, and every man who had the remotest idea of the tune lifted up his voice and did his best. The

result was a mighty volume of song such as the camp had never before known. Scarlett was lifted to the seventh heaven and saw the battle already won, and even the General felt that, after all, the men were far removed from the 'beasts' that they were said to be, and might easily be touched to finer issues.

But in another quarter the effect was different. On the farther side of the railway line Old Lannigan and Big Marsh, for want of other occupation, the shanties being empty, stood in the roadway discussing the situation. Whatever the nature of the opposition, unquestionably it was formidable. The shanties had never been so utterly deserted since the beginning. The position looked serious, and both men were depressed.

'Oi don't know what the . . . has come over thim,' old Lannigan was saying. 'Last noight they'd hev sould their shirts for a pot of beer, an' now they seem to be havin' a prayer-meetin' or some other divilry. Listen to that!' he added, as a great burst of song pealed from the tent out into the night; 'did ye ever hear the loike of it?'

They listened, and borne upon the sea breeze there came the sublime words of the evening hymn. Both men grew uneasy as they listened, and Big Marsh flung back to the 'Blue Pig' impatiently. 'It beats the devil!' he cried as he went.

'It bates the devil!' old Lannigan repeated after him critically, as though trying the words in his teeth. Then as their significance became clear to him he laughed aloud: 'You're right, Marsh!' he shouted, 'an' be gob, when you come to think av it, that's what it's mint for!'

The song ended, the men filed out of the tent with friendly shouts of 'Good-night!' and the

General and Scarlett, having turned out the lights, tied the flaps securely and followed them. On their way to the farmhouse, where they had arranged to sleep that night, Smith expressed his satisfaction.

‘My word, Scarlett,’ he said, ‘you’ve made a good start. If you can only manage to keep it up, you’ll win hands down.’

Scarlett was about to reply when their thoughts were diverted by the sound of singing far up the hill amongst the trees. They stopped to listen, and the hearts of both warmed to the familiar words :—

‘Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.’

The voice ceased and the two men walked on.

‘I shouldn’t be surprised, Scarlett,’ Smith remarked, ‘if the morning of a new day were to break for some of those chaps through this little move of ours. I only hope it may.’

And Scarlett said ‘Amen !’

CHAPTER XIV

THE LADY OF THE CAMP

JOHN SCARLETT was moving about the tent, arranging the papers and magazines on the various tables and making the place shipshape, and John Scarlett was feeling as depressed and miserable as ever he had felt in his life. The General, taking old Anderson with him, had departed on a ballast-train that morning. The last Scarlett saw of them they were seated on their swags on the floor of an open truck, doing their best to hold on as they rattled round the curve in the line. The General's last words were, 'Cheer up, old man, and God bless you. We'll all be praying for you down there.' Then they were gone, and Scarlett returned to the tent.

The place of the high mountains is also the place of the deep abyss, and after the sunlit heights of confidence on which he had trod so airily the night before, Scarlett woke up to find himself in the depths of an apparently bottomless pit of uncertainty and despair. The first excitement was over and the reaction had set in. Pilgrim in the Valley of the Shadow was not more sore beset.

They had had some kind of success the previous night, it was true, but then, he argued, the General

was there, and the whole thing was new, and a new broom sweeps clean. Who could tell what it would be to-night? Suppose the men came in drunk and began to smash things up. What would he do? What *could* he do? Filled with these dreadful forebodings, it is not to be wondered at that he sprang round in alarm at the sound of a slight cough at the door. He was more startled still when he saw who his visitor was. It was not, as Scarlett surmised, some wild navvy, drunk and fightable, with the mistaken idea that the only way to do his duty was to smash the whole place to atoms and bury the proprietor thereof beneath the ruins. Yet it is questionable if even a drunkard would have thrown Scarlett into a more violent state of agitation than did the person actually before him.

The visitor was a woman, and such a woman! Young—probably still in her teens—tall for a woman, full and finely formed. Her face—what Scarlett saw of it in that first bashful glance—was a pure oval. The mouth may have been a trifle large, but its lines were all formed for laughter, and, anyway, one could not have too much of those rich red lips and milk-white teeth. The eyes that peeped shyly out at him from beneath the long lashes were very beautifully shaped—though what their colour was he could not tell.

Disregarding his all too evident perturbation, the visitor said meekly, 'I hope I am not intruding?'

The tones of her voice fell upon his ear as musically as a shower of notes from little silver bells, and he was conscious in a dim fashion that she spoke with the sweetest accent he had ever heard. And, indeed, in all the world there is

strength he clouted a fly into eternity with one smack of the duster, just to show that his powers were not overstated ; but the tremor in her voice undid him, and brought him down from his lofty estate.

' I'm sorry we can't have women at our meetings,' he faltered humbly. ' There's nothing I should like more, and it's all tomfoolery about the men being frightened away. I'm sure if you came they would all want to come.'

The lady tossed her head. ' But I don't want to come ! ' she answered with spirit. ' I never go where I'm tolerated. I only go where I'm wanted—badly.'

Scarlett would have spoken nothing but the truth had he told her that already at least one man in the camp wanted her badly, but his good angel was very near just then. So he answered instead, ' Would you care to come in and have a look round ? '

This was a kind of compromise, and the lady, having a purpose in view, kindly consented, but suddenly remembering something, hesitated, and became serious. Scarlett looked at her inquiringly.

' Are you not wondering who I am,' she asked, ' invading your camp in this outrageous fashion ? '

Scarlett laughed. ' To tell you the truth,' he replied, ' it never occurred to me. I suppose I just felt that you belonged here.'

' So I do,' she said, nodding, ' or very nearly so. My father is Mr. MacDonald, the manager of the Bent Tree Mine up there in the hills, and we are camped with him for a holiday. But we've run out of books, and father said if I came down and were—nice—to you, possibly you would lend me some, and now'—despairingly—' I have offended you.'

But it takes more than that to offend the magnanimous Scarlett, and to prove it he conducts her at once to the corner where the books are stored. It is true that a philanthropic public had provided them for the use of the navvies, and by no stretch of the imagination could Miss MacDonald be included in that category. Nevertheless, Scarlett, usually hag-ridden by his conscience, opened up his treasures without a pang, and bade her help herself. Thus it is that fair women lead brave men astray from the paths of strict rectitude.

The books were only sixpenny paper covers, but at sight of them the lady of the camp was in ecstasies. She bent down and sniffed them delightedly.

'I love even the smell of books,' she said.
'Don't you, Mr. Scarlett?'

'Ye-es,' Scarlett replied cautiously, 'new books.'

'Yes, of course,' the lady added hastily, and then, 'Who is your favourite writer, Mr. Scarlett?'

There was no hesitation now. 'Stevenson,' he replied at once.

'Is he?' with great surprise. 'I have never read a book of his in my life. Isn't he the—the pirate writer?'

'Yes,' Scarlett replied with enthusiasm. 'Pirates and other things. You should read the Prologue to "The Wreckers."'

'Is it very dreadful?'

'It's dreadful nice.' Scarlett, like Thackeray, was not over particular sometimes as regards grammar.

'What is it about?'

The admirer of Stevenson took a deep breath and his eyes kindled.

'Well,' he began, 'he just lifts you, body and

soul, clean out of yourself, and carries you off to a kind of Lotus Island, with loud shores and white beaches, and palm-trees, and warm nights like heaven, and winds fragrant with perfume, and velvet skies littered with stars, and women beautiful as Eve, and——'

But at that juncture he became conscious that the lady of the camp was regarding him with parted lips and eyes wide open with amazement, and his eloquence was cut short in mid-career.

'Is all *that* in "The Wrecker," Mr. Scarlett?'

'All that is in the Prologue, and there are a thousand things more in the book itself.'

'You make me feel that I want to read it. I wonder if it is in this pile?'

'I don't know,' Scarlett replied; 'I hardly think so. But it's in my bag, if you would care to have it.'

The lady expressed herself as most anxious to have it now, and Scarlett departed to find it for her. When he returned she was looking over a copy of Connor's 'Black Rock.'

'That's a writer I like,' she said, holding the book up for Scarlett to see.

'And so do I,' Scarlett replied, 'and it's odd that you should come across that book just now.'

'Why?'

'Well, I've been thinking a good deal about it lately, because it seems to me that the work he describes there is pretty much what we'll have to attempt here. The only thing——'

But here Scarlett came to a sudden stop, and his eyes opened wide as some new and startling thought laid hold of him. The lady looked at him inquiringly. 'Do you sing?' he asked presently.

She smiled as the drift of his thoughts became clear to her. ‘A little,’ she replied.

‘I was wondering——’ he began.

‘If I would come down and sing to the men like the lady in the book!’ she cried, anticipating him.

‘You’ve just struck it,’ he replied brightly, and then suddenly an unpleasant thought seemed to strike him, and for the second time he suddenly became silent and thoughtful. The lady of the camp waited for him to speak.

‘That woman was a Christian,’ he remarked at length, glancing at her in an odd way.

A startled look came across the girl’s beautiful face. Then she flushed hotly.

‘I scarcely understand,’ she said presently. ‘Am I to infer that you think me a heathen?’

Scarlett protested with great vigour that he had not meant that, but it was of no avail—the damsel was not convinced.

‘It’s no use, Mr. Scarlett,’ she said. ‘That’s exactly what you did mean. Oh! I’m afraid,’ she wailed hopelessly (or apparently so), ‘I’m not solemn enough. But it can’t be helped,’ she added; ‘I was born happy, and now it has become a habit. I can’t be blue and long-nosed [probably she meant long-faced] to save myself. But all the same, I’ll come down some night and sing for your old navvies, and if you don’t appreciate me, perhaps they will, even if I am not so lu-lu-lugubrious as some.’ And with this parting shot the victim of happiness bowed coldly, and with an amazing appearance of dignity gathered up her books and swept out into the sunlight, and John Scarlett, with his thoughts in a whirl, stood at the door and watched her as one hypnotised until she disappeared amongst the trees.

Then when that spectre of his morning thoughts, a drunken navvy, dispatched across the road by Big Marsh for the purpose of annoying the enemy, reeled into the tent and begged to know what the . . . Scarlett meant by comin' there, keepin' people from makin' an honest livin', Scarlett was utterly unmoved. The man seemed so insignificant compared with the Minerva he had just encountered that John laughed aloud. He who has faced a whole park of artillery and braved death each second of a long battle is not perturbed by a street fight ; and John Scarlett, having encountered the most beautiful woman in the world, was not to be bullied by any mere man who breathed, least of all by a specimen such as this, and, utterly oblivious to the threatening aspect of the newcomer, he pointed sternly to the notice—

'SMOKING ALLOWED,
BUT NO SWEARING,'

and commanded the astounded navvy to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it in tones of such tremendous authority that the drunk was overawed.

Then, following up his advantage, he ordered him to sit down and have a look at a book, and the man in a dazed fashion obeyed and sat meekly gazing at the marvels of the earth as recorded pictorially in the *Christian Herald*.

But Scarlett having occasion to leave the tent for a little time, he made his escape, and returned, much shaken up, to the 'Blue Pig,' where he gave to the expectant proprietor a thrilling if not very truthful account of his experiences, and although his statement that 'the bloke in the tent roused and swore' at him worse than any of

the gangers could have done was received with a certain amount of scepticism, nevertheless the belief that Scarlett was the worst kind of a 'take-down' received a tremendous impetus, and the feeling gathered weight that he was not to be trifled with.

CHAPTER XV

PROS AND CONS

SCARLETT'S second night at the Seventeen Mile was pretty much a repetition of the first. The football was a great attraction until it was too dark to see, then the crowd filled the tent. To-night, however, the tables were spread with literature and games, while one was set apart for writing, and many wrote letters that night who seldom wrote a letter, not for lack of will but of facilities for doing so. To write a letter in a navvies' tent is an undertaking. If the man has been thoughtful enough to provide himself with ink before leaving home, he probably finds when he goes to use it that the bottle has dried up, the nib of the pen is either broken or kicks like a circus mule, and the paper, such as it is, is covered with dirt and grease, and to crown all, there is no place where the work may be done. With the best intentions in the world, men utterly fail to keep up a correspondence with home.

But to come into a place brilliantly lit, and to sit down at a long table covered with blotting-pads and bright, gleaming pens, with boxes of beautiful paper and envelopes at every man's elbow, a separate ink-pot for each, and the only thing to be done to sit down and set to work, an excuse no longer exists—indeed, the temptation to write

becomes irresistible. And so it came to pass that from the first night many men, particularly young men, wrote letters home to their people who had not written for months ; and all over the country, and indeed here and there in a home beyond the sea, parents and friends took heart of grace, and looked again for the return of the prodigal when a letter arrived written upon the official paper of the Y.M.C.A., for it did not need the tongue of a prophet to tell that the wanderer was at least within touch of an influence for good.

Scarlett sat behind a table on the little platform at the far end of the tent. Now and again he fitted a cylinder to the phonograph by his side and set it going, but for the most part he was content to watch the scene before him, and in all respects it was sufficiently cheerful. The night had fallen cold, with a boisterous wind from the south. Outside it was bleak and miserable, but within all was light and animation. At the farthest table a group of men sat laboriously writing to sweethearts or wives. Near them a Scotchman, who had helped to storm the heights of Dargai, was now fighting a more peaceful battle on the field of a draught-board, against Louis, an excitable little Belgian, a number of others looking on.

At the other tables the bulk of the men were reading the papers or turning over the pages of the dozens of *Southern Spheres*, *Graphics*, *Sketches*, and other illustrated papers that littered the boards.

In one corner Bland Holt, the clown of the camp, swapped stories with old Paddy Barron, who ran him a good second, and every now and again a roar of laughter broke from the group who hemmed them in. Across the tent from these a cluster more seriously disposed talked politics, and anxiously

discussed the chances of 'Labour' at the Federal elections, now near at hand. But the largest and noisiest of all sections was the quoit-players. They had taken sides, picked out teams, and were playing a match in which they were keenly interested. Every decent throw was greeted with a roar of delight by the thrower's side and a corresponding roar of disapproval from the others.

At the end of the platform from Scarlett the Bishop sat, apparently oblivious to his surroundings, softly improvising on the organ. Everywhere pipes were going freely, and comfort and contentment overshadowed all.

Scarlett, whose morning spirit of elation had not yet gone from him, looked upon it, and declared that it was good. 'It only needs guiding,' he muttered, 'and the thing will run itself.'

Nor was he the only one who surveyed the scene with calculating glance. Andy Callander, the big Irish foreman of the pitmen, a man with a complexion like a girl, and with modesty to match, had been sitting at the corner of a table studying the scene for some time. Presently he crossed over to where Eddy Flynn, one of his cronies, sat on the end of a seat, engaged apparently in the same task.

'What do you make of it, Eddy?' he asked

'Hard to say,' the other replied laconically. 'Looks like a bit of all right, but you never can tell.'

'Do you think they're on the make?'

'The Ganger says "No."'

'What ganger?'

'Him that's running it. Scarlett.'

'Yes—but—?'

'That's what I'm sayin' to myself, Andy,' the other responded, rousing himself. 'The thing's

unnatural, and if they're not on the make, they're the first of the kind I ever struck in my life. All this for nothin'! It's hard to believe.'

'That's my trouble. It looks too good to be true. If they'd studied the thing out for years, they couldn't have fitted the need better, and God knows it wanted doin' bad enough. Do you think the Government is behind them, Eddy?'

'Government be d---d!' Eddy replied, removing his pipe and spitting on the floor. 'A Government is a machine, and machines don't feel. All the Government cares for is to get the work done. No, it's not the Government, though it ought to be. It's either what he says, or else it's some bloomin' fake. But I'm satisfied about this,' he went on. 'If that chap is the genuine article, and he hasn't got some trick up his sleeve to beat us when he gets us on the end of his line, this is the greatest thing that ever came our way.'

'You're right there, Eddy. The thing that beats me is how the devil they ever managed to think it all out.'

There was silence then for a time, both men smoking thoughtfully, but at length Eddy knocked the ashes out of his pipe and leaned over the table.

'Old Danny,' he whispered, 'was sayin' to-day that maybe it's a Protestant thrick to get hold of us all. What do you think of it?'

Andy shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

'I think old Danny's mad,' he said irritably. 'It's the same with all the men from the Old Country, Orange and Green alike. They've been up against it so long there that they can't shake it off when they get here, and I sometimes wish the Irish, north and south, with their accursed quarrels about religion, had never set foot in

Australia—only where would I have been then? Between them they're drivin' a wedge into the heart of this young nation that may some day split it in two in a civil war. With them it is not "Is a thing right, or is it wrong? or is it for the good or bad of Australia?" but the question always is, "Is it Catholic? Is it Protestant?" and it's good or bad accordingly. They look at everything through the dust of the old quarrels, and between them nothing gets a chance on its merits. It's nothing but suspicion from beginning to end.'

'Well, maybe you're right, Andy,' the other replied, 'an' the only thing we have to do is to see that this thing gets a fair run for its money, take all that's goin' and keep our eyes peeled, and if Scarlett does try to bate us—'

'We'll know what to do with him.'

'That's it. Well, I'm off to bunk. Good-night!'

'Good-night!'

Eddy rose up and went out into the night, but Andy had not yet satisfied himself. Presently he left his seat and strolled up to Scarlett.

'This is a popular place, Mr. Scarlett,' he began.

'Yes,' Scarlett replied, looking round. 'It seems so, but will they keep it up? That's the question I keep asking myself.'

'They'll keep it up all right so long as you keep it down at the same price.'

'Well, then, there's no need to worry.'

'You mean you're going to give us all this free of charge?'

'Yes, so long as it's of practical benefit to the men, and they make use of it.'

'They'll make use of it, you can bet your life. A navvy is a fool in some things, but not in all. But how did you come to think of all this?'

'Well,' Scarlett replied, 'we were told what the state of the camps was, and when it was decided to do something we simply planned out what we thought would be most likely to attract and help the men. There wasn't much planning needed either, but as we go on and get to know the work, we'll improve our arrangements—that is, if the men appreciate them ; but that, in many minds, is the doubtful part. We've been told, for instance, that we might as well fling our money in the sea, that the bulk of these men are beasts and can only be treated as beasts.'

Andy Callander was a railway-man to his finger-tips, and with all the strength of his Celtic soul he resented this reflection upon his class.

'I don't know who told you that, Mr. Scarlett,' he said savagely, 'but I'd like to meet the man and hear him say it. You hear a great deal about navvies,' he went on, 'and some of it's true. There's drinking and fighting and the devil to pay generally, and many a man's family starves while he's earning good money. But why is it? Because he wants it that way? Make no mistake, it's because the two-up schools and the shanties are too strong for him. They meet him everywhere he turns, and often it's a case of go to the shanty or go mad. Just you think what it means,' he continued. 'A man comes back to camp after a hard day's work—it may be wet or it may be fine, cold or hot. He gets his tea, and what then? He can sit in his tent and shiver or stew if he likes, or he can turn in to his bunk and try to sleep ; and if a man had the soul of a dingo he might do it, but a man is built different from a dingo. He craves for company and the society of his fellows, and in a navvies' camp the only place

where he can get it is in a shanty. If there's music, it's there, and if there's singin' it's there, and if there's a bit of dancin' or life or fun of any kind it's in the shanty, and to the shanty he goes, and who can blame him? The shanties are the curse of every camp. But it's no use tryin' to blot them out unless you're prepared to put something else in their place, because to a certain extent they meet a great need. They supply the only bit of social life the camps afford. Now, the thing that's wanted is the kind of thing you've got here ; the only question is—'

' Well? '

' Well, is it strictly undenominational, and is it what it seems on the surface? Don't get angry,' he added hastily, as Scarlett moved impatiently. ' If you'd had my experience, you'd believe nothing until you proved it. I've had twenty-five years at railway work, and in all that time nearly every fish that has come to my net in this way has been a shark.'

Scarlett was silent a little space, thinking, then he said—

' I don't blame you, though every decent man likes to be taken at his surface value, and after all I may be a failure, and disappoint you ; but I tell you, once again and for all, we're not here on behalf of any denomination, and we're not here to make money ; but we're here in the name of Jesus Christ to try and help the men to better things, and what you've said about the matter encourages me to believe we'll succeed. Apparently we've struck the right thing.'

' The right thing! ' Andy echoed. ' You couldn't have struck it better if you'd tried for twenty years. Well, I take your word for it, Mr. Scarlett, that the thing is on clean lines, and I tell

you I'm glad you've come. This is the greatest godsend that ever came to a navvy camp.'

Obeying a common impulse, the two men extended their hands, and Andy grasped Scarlett's in a grip that made the bones crack and the muscles of his face twitch ; but it was worth while suffering, for from that hour, although he knew it not, Scarlett had gained to his side the friendship and powerful influence of the most popular boss on the line. But as Andy turned away a thought struck Scarlett, and he called him back.

'One thing is puzzling me,' he said. 'I've kept my eyes open, but there isn't half the drinking going on I expected to find.'

Andy laughed. 'There's no need to feel disappointed,' he said. 'You'll see enough of it if you stay a little longer. The reason that there's so little of it now is that nearly everybody is stony-broke over the last bout, but you wait until pay-day, and then you'll see.'

'I understand,' Scarlett replied. 'And when is pay-day ?'

'Saturday week.'

twinkling the while like twin stars and his very whiskers seeming to crackle with delight.

'And you've come down here, I'm told, to—to—transform this place and make the—ah—"wilderness to blossom like the rose."'

Scarlett shook his head deprecatingly. 'I'll be well content,' he said, 'if we can open a refuge for any poor soul trying to escape from the curse of the drink, and brighten things up a bit for the others.'

'You'll do all that, never fear,' the other returned cheerily, 'and a good deal more—and not before it's time, Mr. Scarlett, not before it's time. Do you know what happened to me the last time I came down into this camp?'

Scarlett had no idea, and Mr. Dingley went on with great impressiveness—

'I was coming down with a load of butter and eggs for the boarding-houses, and had got as far as the road up there in the bush, when I saw a spring cart turn round and drive hurriedly away. I thought it strange, so I pulled Wilhelmina up and got down, and went a few paces into the scrub to see what it could mean. I hadn't gone half a dozen yards before I saw two barrels under a bush, and I knew what that meant. Shanties, sir, shanties! And I was standing looking at them, wondering what to do, when all of a sudden four men rose up out of the scrub, and one of them—Big Marsh, as he is called here—asked me what the—the—something, Mr. Scarlett, I was doing there. I said it was Government property, and I had as much right there as the next man. "Well," he says, "the sooner you're out of this the better, right or no right." I was thinking that way myself, Mr. Scarlett, so I turned to go; but Big Marsh, who was playing with a gun he

had in his hand, said, "Wait a minute," and then, when I was wondering what they meant to do, he said, "You're a useful man to the camp, Mr. Dingley, with your eggs and butter, and we're good customers to you with our money, and people in business shouldn't quarrel. If you're a wise man, Mr. Dingley, you've seen nothing here, and you'll never see anything in the camp you shouldn't see, and then you can come and go and no harm to you. . But," he says, "if you see things you shouldn't see and begin to talk about them——" That was all he said, Mr. Scarlett, but his meaning was unmistakable.'

'And if he thinks you are seeing too much, Mr. Dingley, what then?' Scarlett asked eagerly.

'Well, I suppose I shall get knocked on the head some night when I'm on my way home ; that's what I gathered from his looks, anyway. But all the same, Mr. Scarlett, the first thing I did when I got home was to write a letter to the Premier, stating the facts and demanding that something be done at once. And it shall be done, sir. Our Premier may be—ah—deliberate—all really great men are—but when the necessity arises no man can move faster, and when he does move, things happen, and I've every confidence he will move in this matter. It's an outrage, sir, an outrage, that I, who have lived twenty years in this district, should have to order my conduct at the bidding of a scoundrel like that. But all the same,' the old gentleman added softly, and with a look of wonderful acuteness, 'I don't tell everybody I've written to the Premier, and I shall not be wandering about after dark any more than is necessary.'

Having said this, Father Christmas threw back his head and laughed uproariously. It was a great joke.

'And that's one reason why I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Scarlett,' he went on presently. 'Two heads, Mr. Scarlett, you know—two heads! And between us we'll get a rod in pickle for the 'Blue Pig' and the rest of them. Eh?' And with that the old gentleman went off again into renewed shouts of laughter.

After a time he simmered down a little, and, steadfastly regarding Scarlett, went on to say: 'But the chief reason I had in coming to-day, was to ask you to come up and pay us a visit at Mount Pleasant. Come up Sunday morning early, and I'll yoke up Wilhelmina and we'll drive across to the little church in the hills and then back to dinner. Now, don't say you can't.'

'I certainly shall not say I can't,' Scarlett replied, 'for there's nothing I should enjoy more, though I'll have to be back again fairly early for an evening service.'

'Good! Very good!' the enthusiastic old gentleman cried, extending his hand again. 'Come up early. Mother will be delighted to see you, and we'll have a day of it. Get up, Wilhelmina. Sunday next, Mr. Scarlett. God bless you! Good-bye! Goodbye!' and with a flourish of his whip, he was gone.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RAID

As for Scarlett, he returned to his work greatly cheered and encouraged. It was true that so far he had been successful beyond his dreams, but the responsibility was very great. His troubles were all to come, of that he felt sure, nor could they be long delayed, and the prospect of a break in the routine and a day's fellowship with kindred minds was pleasant to contemplate.

Besides—and his pulse quickened at the thought—possibly Miss MacDonald would be at the service at the church, and he would see her, and—and—but the bare possibility of again beholding that entrancing maiden sent such a thrill of fearful ecstasy through his blood that for the rest of the morning he gave himself up to vain imaginings as he went about his work.

That evening Scarlett, returning from tea to the Social Hall, was surprised to find the football paddock deserted. Not a man was to be seen. Arrived at the hall, he found it empty. An engine stood deserted on the line. There was no sign of life about the coal-dump. It was quite evident that something unusual was afoot, and Scarlett hastened across the line to see what it might be. He was inclined to suspect a fight, and when he

had reached the farther side he was sure. It seemed to him that everybody in camp was round about the Shanty, and Scarlett trembled and felt sick. Of all things he dreaded a fight, and his first impulse was to go to his tent and wait until it was over. But his determination to do if he died for it proved stronger than his fears, and he made his way timidly through the undergrowth to the edge of the crowd.

But it was not a fight after all. Two buggies were drawn close up to the Shanty, and both were driven by men in uniform. A strikingly tall and erect man with dark, piercing eyes stood at the door, giving orders in sharp, imperative tones. Scarlett drew near, wondering what it could mean. As he did so he was amazed to see old Lanigan being unceremoniously bundled out of the Shanty by a little man in the garb of a navvy, whom Scarlett remembered to have seen playing quoits, slightly the worse for drink, the day after he arrived. The man's new rôle filled him with surprise. Nor was he the only surprised one. It was soon clearly manifest to everybody that the camp had been raided by revenue officers, and also that their erstwhile comrade was a detective in disguise, and at sight of him a thrill passed through the crowd, and they turned to one another in amazement.

But although their sympathies were strongly with the Shanty men, they were for the present too surprised to do more than speculate concerning him. As for the man in question, he had no sooner bundled old Lanigan into the buggy than he dived again into the Shanty and returned with another of Lanigan's gang, who had acted as a spotter. Something like a snarl ran through the crowd when the ex-navvy appeared the second

time, but the tall man swung round and faced them instantly.

'What!' he cried, but nobody answered, and the crisis passed, for there was that in his face that even a crowd of navvies did not care to provoke.

When next the little man appeared he was rolling a barrel, and, having got it to the nearest buggy, he tilted it aboard with great dexterity, and disappeared again. A moment later he emerged carrying a smaller barrel in his arms, and having got that aboard, he ran without a word to the leading buggy and leaped up beside the driver, and they were off. Simultaneously the tall man sprang up in the second trap and it, too, began to move.

All was done with such perfect method and understanding, and with such amazing speed, that the camp had scarcely realised that the Shanty was being raided before the thing was over and the culprits going to their deserts. But as the second trap cleared the crowd, Big Marsh found his voice.

'A groan for the informer!' he roared. The second trap stopped dead, and with incredible swiftness the tall man flashed round, a gleaming revolver in his hand, covering the astonished Marsh.

'Have you anything more to say?' he asked quietly, but every word, by some curious quality of speech, stinging as though edged with steel.

Marsh was silent. After waiting a moment the tall man added, 'If there's any more of that, you'll come along too, my lad.'

There was no more. The tall man smiled in a way not good to look at, the trap moved off again and disappeared in the gloom. The crowd stood

for a space of thirty seconds, looking after them as though hypnotised. Then the spell passed away and all began to speak and gesticulate at once, and for the rest of the night nothing was talked of but the raid.

Rejoicing greatly, though secretly and with trembling, that the law had reached the shanties at last, Scarlett returned to the hall ; but if he imagined that the arrest of the shantymen would have meant increased numbers and easier work he was mistaken. Very few men came that night, and such as did were in no mood for phonographs, singing, or games. They sat in knots and discussed the raid.

The next day turned out wet—so wet that work was impossible—and the hall was full from early morning, and the thud of the rings about the quoit-peg went on unceasingly. But not all the men were there, for a rumour had gone abroad that old Lanigan had concealed two casks of beer somewhere in the scrub, and parties were out eagerly searching for them all day. Late in the afternoon Scarlett had occasion to leave the hall for his living tent for a time, and when he returned the place was nearly empty.

'Where are the boys?' he asked of Garfield, an ex-Salvation Army man and a decent fellow, whom he had lately got to know.

'I guess they've found that beer,' Garfield replied. 'Some one came running just now and whispered to Duckfoot Clarke, and he made off and the rest after him. But we'll soon know,' he added grimly. And he was right.

As night came on any hopes Scarlett may have had were speedily dashed. The Shanty was lit up brilliantly. After a time a huge bonfire was kindled in front of it, and then, as time went on

and the beer began to take effect, the fun grew fast and furious. Shouts of wild laughter and stentorian singing drowned every other sound, and after a time, looking out, Scarlett could plainly see a crowd of men dancing like devils round about the fire. Later on, as is invariably the case, the fun changed to fury. Snatches of argument mingled with horrid oaths filled the air. Quarrel after quarrel arose, and, regardless of the rain, the men dragged off their rags to fight and afterwards many lay down and slept where they had fought, to awake with shattered nerves and desperate colds bordering on pneumonia.

Comparatively early in the evening Scarlett decided to put out the lights in the hall lest they should attract the toughs across to wreck it, for he well knew that with men in such a condition nothing would be sacred or safe. Then he went to his tent, but fearing a visit from the crowd, refrained from showing a light, and, after securing the entrance as well as could be, he piled up what tins and pans he could find, that no one might effect an entrance without noise. Then, after a final peep outside, he crept fully dressed into his bunk, where he lay broad awake, shivering and fearful, till the grey light of day.

In the morning the rain had gone, and the gangers mustered their men, but every gang went out short-handed. Of the revellers of the night before scarcely a dozen were able to go, but coming forth later on with bloodshot eyes and palsied limbs, spent the day blundering about the camp and reeling and cursing their way from tent to tent and place to place. One in particular, apparently driven mad by the drink he had taken, lay in his bunk and shrieked and yelled like a devil, until the whole camp was by the ears, and

then, rushing out, divested of every rag of clothes except his shirt, raged up and down the road before the hall, calling upon the name of his God, and cursing all creation and the Y.M.C.A. in particular, as Shimei cursed David.

Poor Scarlett, with every nerve tingling, went in fear of his life all the day, and thanked God from his heart when the trains came back in the evening, bringing the sober men from their work. But the picture of this Shimei marching up and down the road, up and down, was painted on his brain, and presently he went inside and fell upon his knees.

'God in heaven !' he cried. 'If his mother could see her boy now !' And then, 'Give me courage and sense, that I may do something to save them !'

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. CHIRNSIDE TURNS UP

IT was Scarlett's custom to breakfast with the men at seven o'clock. The rest of his mornings, almost till lunch-time, was taken up with the cleaning of the tent and lamps and the rearranging of the papers and magazines upon the tables. What remained he devoted to reading.

One day, having finished a little earlier than usual, he had thrown himself upon his bunk to read, when a man's head was suddenly thrust in the opening of the tent; then the curtain was drawn back and a figure stood revealed that brought Scarlett to his feet in astonishment. The face of the newcomer was the embodiment of gentle enthusiasm, and, at the moment, was lit up by a smile of great friendliness. His eyes were mild as the eyes of oxen, and into the right one was stuck—after the manner of Mr. George Reid—a gold-rimmed monocle. His lips were as geranium red as the lips of a girl, and from the upper one a little moustache curled away as daintily as the tendrils of a vine.

Something of all this Scarlett took in before a word was spoken, and it was sufficiently arresting, yet it was not that so much as the get-up of the man that held Scarlett spellbound. To begin with, he wore a fashionable silk hat. The nap was

slightly roughened, it is true—still, there it was, and the quality undeniable. His collar, though somewhat travel-stained, was of such prodigious height that the boarding-house boss, in describing him to the denizens of the 'Blue Pig,' said he reminded him of a horse with his head over a white fence. He wore a full frock-coat, hot socks, and patent-leather shoes. In one hand he carried a suit-case and in the other a gold-headed cane. Taking him altogether, he would have made an admirable walking advertisement for a fashionable tailor.

Scarlett, as we have seen, was something of a fashion-plate himself, and in the city and under ordinary circumstances would have hailed the newcomer with satisfaction as a kindred spirit and a man of taste, but under present conditions the man's appearance was so incongruous that he could have laughed aloud. Nor was his amazement lessened when his visitor spoke, for his first sentence betrayed a slight stammer, and that oddest and most affected of all our little tricks of speech, the turning of the r's into w's.

'M-M-Mr. Scarlett, I pwesume?' he said hopefully.

'That's me,' Scarlett replied, with more force than dignity, for already the speech of the camp had begun to work its will upon him.

The gentleman, with a look of relief, set down his suit-case and fumbled in a breast-pocket. Presently he brought forth a letter, and after giving his monocle an additional screw into his eye, made sure of the address, and then handed it to Scarlett.

'That letter contains my quendentials,' he explained.

Inside the envelope Scarlett found a brief note in the General's handwriting.

'The bearer,' it ran, 'is Mr. Albert Edward Chirnside. He is a member of the Association, and eager to see the kind of work you are doing. He is a good fellow, notwithstanding appearances. Treat him well.'

Scarlett pocketed the letter and extended his hand. 'I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Chirnside,' he said, 'but I'm afraid you'll find things a bit rougher here than you're used to.'

Mr. Chirnside beamed. 'D-d-don't mention it, Mr. Scarlett, I beg,' he returned. 'They t-t-told me at the office it would be wough, so I dwessed myself suitably and came pwepared to wough it, and it was j-j-just as well,' he added; 'for, by Jove, I've been w-w-woughing it ever since I got out at the junction.'

It struck Scarlett that if this was the way in which Mr. Chirnside dressed himself when prepared to rough it, his appearance when dressed for church or the block must be something to remember. However, he kept his thoughts to himself, and courteously inviting his visitor in, gave him a seat on his bunk.

'Let me take your hat,' he said; and there being no place inside where such a hat could rest, he stuck it on the end of the ridge-pole just outside, where it hung conspicuously, and speedily became the centre of observation and a source of temptation to such of the 'boys' as were about the camp.

Mr. Chirnside, meanwhile, with a sigh of great relief, lay back on the bunk luxuriously.

'T-t-this has been a time of twial,' he remarked presently.

'Yes?' Scarlett replied expectantly. 'Have you come from Melbourne to-day?'

'No,' the other returned. 'I left Melbourne

yesterday, but so much has happened since, t-t-that it s-s-seems an eternity. It was all wight till I got to Nyowa, and then my twibulations began. It was w-w-waining hard when I stepped out of the t-t-twain, and the first sight I saw was a couple of policemen dwagging a woman along in a b-b-bag. They had the bag over her head, and t-t-tied down about her arms with a wope. The w-w-woman was kicking and squealing and cwying for help, so I stepped up to the men just as they were getting her in, and caught one of them by the arm, and said, "C-c-constable, w-w-what do you mean by tweating a l-l-lady like this?" He said, "What?" I wepeated what I said at first, and then he actually had the effwontowy to tell me to go to that p-p-place where there's n-n-neither fwost nor snow, and the crowd there, instead of taking the part of that helpless female, simply woared with laughter. I felt angwy enough to have scwewed the man's neck, b-b-but just then the lady saved me the necessity by kicking him in the abdomen, and then the twain started, so I l-l-left him to his weflections. I learned fwom the cwowd that the lady's name was "Bluebell." Wather a womantic n-n-name, I thought, Mr. Scarlett? ' he added interrogatively.

Scarlett laughed.

' Bluebell is a romantic character,' he replied. ' Everybody knows her here. But where did you sleep? At the pub? '

' I p-p-put up at the "Old Bull and Bush," but it would be a sewious departure fwom the twuth to say I slept. I t-t-twied to hard enough, but it was no use. The place was cwowded out, and instead of a woom to myself, I had to share one with two vewy wough chawacters. I was in b-b-bed when they came in, and one of them insisted that

I was in his bed, and all my w-w-wemonstwations were in vain. At first I wfused to wise, but he said if I didn't he would fight me for it. So, to pwevent a disturbance, I vacated it, and t-t-took the other. When that matter was settled, one of them wanted to have the door and the window open, and the other man wanted them both shut, and they w-w-wangled about that for ever so long. Eventually, when they were about to fight over it, I suggested as a compwomise that they shut the door and leave the window open, and after a while they agweed, w-w-with this diffewence, that they shut the window and kept the door open.

' After that I thought things would settle down, so I c-c-composed myself for sleep, but it pwoved to be pwemature. It seems my fellows were non-unionists, and just as I was getting to sleep a d-deputation of two men came from the union to persuade them to j-j-join. But my fellows d-d-didn't want to join. They said that before they gave their hard-earned money to make fat billets for a lazy loafer of a union official, they would see them in H-H-Hanover, and then the t-t-trouble began afwesh.

' The union fellows said my fellows were scabs, weaping all the b-b-benefits of unionism and not contwibuting a ha'penny to its support, and m-m-my fellows wetorted that the union men were w-w-wire-haired idiots, taxing themselves to give fat b-b-billets to a handful of officials who never did a day's m-m-manual labour in their lives. Then both parties got warm and b-b-began to shout at one another, and fwom shouting had just about come to blows, when a cwowd came down the p-p-passage and into the woom to see what was the matter, and they sat on the b-b-beds to listen, and incidentally they s-s-sat on me, who was in

bed ; and when it came to that, I felt the occasion called for stwong measures, and that it would be only twifling with the situation to permit such a liberty. I ordered them to leave the woom at once, and in the event of their wefusing thweatened to call the landlord. I imagined that would have settled them, but weally it seemed to have vewy little effect, for they only l-l-laughed upwoawiously, and one of them clapped my hat on his head and m-m-mounted a chair and began to sing a song about "Where did you get that hat?" I had nearly begun to despair, when fortunately the c-c-candle blew out, and the cwowd went out then, and when they got out, our fellows were careful to l-l-lock the door on them. I was awfaid my hat had gone with them, but when we stwuck a m-m-match, I found it on the foot of my bed.

'After that I thought, " Possibly now I shall have some wepose." But it was not to be. First of all, my woom mates quawwelled about which bed each should have, and when on my suggestion they t-t-tossed up for it, and got into bed, a dwunken man t-t-took up his quarters outside the window, and sang that song about " Pwetty Wed Wing." I wouldn't have minded his unpleasant voice so much, though it was one of the worst I ever heard. It was the wepetition of the thing I objected to. He sang it over and over and over again, and eventually I awose and went to the window and asked him to desist, but he said he'd see me—c-c-condemned first, and went on singing, and then I lost my temper—and under the circumstances, Scarlett, I think it was excusable—and I said : " D-d-dash it all, man, I've had just about enough of ' Pwetty Wed Wing.' " So I dwessed myself and went down to the station and passed the wemainder of the night on a seat.

' It was most misewably cold sitting there, but I consoled myself with the weflection that I would be in good time for the twain ; and after all I hadn't so long to wait, for about four o'clock they began to move about and get up steam in the engines. So I looked wound until I found a twuck loaded up, and then I climbed aboard and sat there all weady to start.

' After a while a man came along. He seemed vewy much surpwised to see me sitting there, and he said—

' "W-w-what are you d-d-doing in that twuck?"

' I said, " I'm going to Woolamai."

' " Are you? " he said, and I weplied that such was my intention.

' " Well," he said, " if you sit on that twuck till you get to Woolamai you'll pwobably take woot ! "

' I asked him what he meant by that, and he said—

' " That twuck is not going ! "

' I was vewy much disappointed to hear it, but I thanked him for the information, and got down and had another look wound. After a while I found a long stwing of twucks with t-t-timber aboard and an engine attached, and I concluded that they must be going. So I c-c-cawwied my suit-case up on the top of one of these and waited. After a while it began to move, and I said : " Well, thank goodness, we're off at last ! "

' But my wejoicing was pwemature, for they merely shunted us off into a siding, and the engine was detached, and we were left there. I was beginning to feel wather perplexed then, but I had the pwesence of mind to board another twuck that stood by weady loaded, and I was just think-

ing that, after all, things might have been worse, when a man came along and said—

“W-w-what are you doing in that twuck?”

‘I weplied at once, “I’m going to Woolamai.”

“But,” he said, “that twuck doesn’t go to Woolamai!”

‘Then I gwew despewate, and so wesolved to take the bull by the forelock, and I said, “Well, can you tell me which twuck *does* go to Woolamai?”

“Oh, yes,” he said, “that one does,” pointing to one acwoss the yard.

‘So I thanked him, and after some little twouble got aboard that twuck. It had a load of steel wails, and I made myself as comfortable as I could, and waited with gweat confidence. But after a while a porter, who was going by, put the question to me again—

“W-w-what are you doing in that twuck?”

‘I was gwowing vewy impatient of that question, and I weplied wather shortly—

“I’m going to Woolamai.”

‘Then he gwinned in a most aggwavating way, and said—

“You’ll be pwetty hungwy by the time you get there.”

“Why?” I asked. “Doesn’t this twuck go to Woolamai?”

“Oh, it goes there all wight,” he weplied, “but not until to-morrow.”

‘Well, by that time I was weawy of the whole business, but I wesolved upon a last despewate twy, so I asked—

“Are there any twucks going to Woolamai *to-day?*”

“Yes,” he said, pointing out a long twain that was backing in to the platform; “those twucks are

going to Woolamai in a few minutes' time, and if you want to go there you had better get aboard."

"I was thankful beyond words to hear that, so I scwambled down as b-b-best I could and got aboard one of those twucks, and felt vewy welived. But my twoubles were not over. I was no sooner seated comfortably upon the floor than the guard of the twain came along and said—

"W-w-what are you doing in that twuck?"

"My patience was nearly exhausted, but I answered him civilly, and said I was going to Woolamai.

"Oh," he said, "and have you got a pass?"

"No," I said, "I haven't. I didn't know it was necessawy."

"Well," he said, "you can't twavel on that twuck without a pass."

"I t-t-told him I thought he was labouwing under a misappwehension, b-b-but it was of no avail. He said they had got stwict orders about it, and he couldn't allow me to twavel, and I would have to g-g-get down off that twuck. Then I began to despair, and concluded that I had better weturn to the c-c-city ; but just then, most pwovidentially, a tall, fair gentleman came along. He pwoved to be the supewintending engineer, and when he learned what the twouble was, he not only gave me permission to wide, but came and sat beside me, and so we came along both of us sitting on—the—the flat of our seats—on the floor of the t-t-twuck."

Probably Mr. Chirnside had not quite finished his story ; nevertheless, at that point he came to an abrupt conclusion, for a large potato, hurled at the bell-topper on the ridge-pole by an unseen hand, and missing it by an ace, whistled through

the opening of the tent and smote the side just above his head with a resounding thud.

Mr. Chirnside looked at Scarlett for an explanation. Scarlett was careful first to withdraw the object of temptation from the ridge-pole, then he said—

'That's a hint that it's getting near dinner-time.'

'Indeed I' Mr. Chirnside exclaimed; and then, 'Is that their usual method of announcing dinner?'

'No,' Scarlett replied ambiguously, 'they generally ring a bullock-bell; but there are no very hard-and-fast rules in this camp. Still, we had better take the hint. Now, how about a wash and brush-up?'

'The vewy thing,' Mr. Chirnside responded eagerly, pulling off his coat, and by the time his toilet was completed the lunch-hour was fully come and the bullock-bell pealing. So they strolled across to the 'boarding-house, and Chirnside spread out his tails and sat himself down cheek-by-jowl with the thunder-stricken pitmen.

CHAPTER XIX

THE COMBAT

LUNCH over, Scarlett and his guest made their way to the marquee, where Scarlett showed him over the place, explained to him its workings, and introduced him to such stragglers as were about.

Chirnside beamed upon them all, and expressed himself delighted with everything, from the phonograph to the letter-rack. This done, they crossed the line to the paymaster's quarters, and there they found, not only the paymaster but the store-keeper, big Tom Johnson, the bridge foreman, and several of the timekeepers.

It was a kind of off-time, and after introductions and the spell which Mr. Chirnside's appearance had cast upon them had worn off a little, the conversation became general. Presently, however, they were disturbed by the sound of voices that rose higher and higher as they listened. The voices came from the railway-track, where an engine stood panting after a long run up the hill. The sounds were ominous, and, after a moment's silence to make sure, everybody rushed outside.

On the footplate of the engine stood the senior engine-driver on the works, Mr. Terence O'Brien, a tall, lath-like man, and on the ground before him stood Mr. Jerry Ryan, the ganger of the

'gallopers out,' who was as short and stout as the other was tall and thin. Both men were evidently highly excited. Terry was leaning down from his engine, shaking his fist in the face of Mr. Ryan, who stood on his toes on the ground, reciprocating the compliment with interest, while each shouted in the face of the other at the top of his voice. Just how the quarrel originated it would be difficult to say. Neither man was a drinker ; both were experts in their own particular line, and, as a general rule, firm friends. But they were of Irish extraction, and, like most of that highly-strung race, quick to take offence, and not much averse to settling their differences with their fists.

'And would ye dare to shtand there on that engine and tell me that to me face?' Jerry was demanding.

'Yis ; an' I'd shtand on the ground and tell ye it to yer teeth !' Terry retorted hotly.

'Is it foight ye want, Terry O'Brien ?'

'If it was foight Oi wanted, Oi'd hev to go somewhere else. Ye haven't a foight in ye.'

'It's ye that hasn't a foight in ye, Terry O'Brien. Ye couldn't foight yer way out of a paper bag, an' if ye come down off that engine Oi'll woipe the dust off Australia wid ye.'

'Oi'll come down quick enough, Jerry Ryan.'

'Come on, thin, ye wooden-headed goanner, and see what Oi'll do wid ye !'

'Oi'm comin', ye bald-headed ould Platypus ! Hould me hat, Mick.' This to the fireman, and Terry swung himself off his engine.

Mr. Ryan, for his part, flung his hat on the ground ; his vest followed it, and then his shirt, and finally his undershirt, revealing a mighty chest and arms. It was seen at once that anything he

may have lacked in height he more than made up in breadth, and, after spitting on his hand and giving a hitch to his trousers, he squared up and stood waiting the onslaught of the foe. Nor had he long to wait. Terry was more than willing, and the ill-assorted pair, the one six feet and the other five-feet-six, confronted each other with eyes glaring and arms sawing the air, sparring round for an opening.

And all this time John Scarlett suffered the pangs of purgatory. From his point of view a fight was a scandalous and dreadful thing, and should be stopped at any cost. But how to stop it?

'Tom !' he cried, turning in desperation to the big bridge foreman, 'can't something be done to stop this ?'

'No !' Tom answered shortly. 'It's no use, Ganger ; let 'em have a bit of each other and they'll be satisfied, and you'll see them swapping spits before night-time. If you don't, they'll go on rowing and finish up this way in the end. Let 'em have it, Ganger. Let 'em have it.'

By this time every man about the camp was on the scene, filled with delight at the prospect of two of the bosses having a go ; but, unlike most fights, in this no sides were taken. No doubt all had their personal predilections, but they were careful not to show them. To-morrow might find them working under the man they had opposed, and then there would be trouble. So every navvy present preserved a discreet silence, though their eyes danced for joy.

Scarlett looked all round in the hope of finding one to help him, but he saw that everywhere public opinion was dead against him. Chirnside, with consternation written all over his face,

adjusted and readjusted his eyeglass in a vain endeavour to take in the full facts of the situation.

'I say, Scarlett !' he cried presently, 'are they about to wesoit to v-v-violence ?'

The very absurdity of the question steadied Scarlett's nerves somewhat, and he became calmer.

'I'm afraid they are,' he replied.

'But is there no way to pwevent it?' the other inquired anxiously.

'I can't see any !' despairingly.

'But d-d-don't you think, Scarlett, if I were to addwess them and point out that it's a b-b-bweach of the peace they might be fwightened into giving it up?'

At another time Scarlett would have laughed at this innocent suggestion, but just now he was too worried. Chirnside's anxiety had the effect of firing him up afresh, and, taking his courage in both hands, he pushed through the ring and grasped the militant Mr. Ryan by the shoulder.

'Mr. Ryan,' he gasped, 'this is unworthy of you !'

Ryan swung round angrily, but when he saw who it was he looked slightly ashamed and seemed disposed to think better of it. But it was decreed otherwise. Terry was determined to fight, and his nose curled up with scorn.

'It's no use tryin' to save him, Ganger !' he yelled. 'Oi'm goin' to give him a batin' if Oi hev to catch him in the scrub.'

That was enough, and more than enough. Jerry flung Scarlett aside and fairly rolled in to his opponent, and for the next few minutes the combatants were an indistinguishable mass of whirling limbs, and the excitement was intense.

The bulk of the spectators enjoyed it immensely, and, unable to take sides, solved the difficulty by

encouraging both to do their best. The men responded magnificently—that is, if magnificence there can be in a thing of this kind. Scarlett certainly did not think so. He stood back, trembling and half sick, while Mr. Chirnside, if one might judge from his expression, regarded the whole business as not only in wretchedly bad taste, but as something very terrifying indeed. His face was white, his monocle fell neglected from his eye, his hands clenched, and his breath came in quick pants, synchronising with every blow that was struck.

The first round ended disastrously for Mr. Ryan ; for in one of his onslaughts he fairly carried his enemy off his feet, and the pair of them falling backwards against the engine, Mr. Ryan's forehead came into contact with the footplate, and, as a result, he received a gash from which a stream of blood issued and flowed down his face through his bushy eyebrows and moustache, giving him an appearance quite frightful to behold. Nor was he improved by the measures adopted for his relief by the boarding-house boss.

This gentleman immediately after the accident hurried away, and returning with a billy of water just as the combatants were about to resume hostilities, took a huge gulp of water in his mouth, and putting his face right in that of the other, blew it all over him, and before Mr. Ryan could realise what had happened had repeated the dose. Later on he explained that this was the method laid down in the Marquis of Queensberry rules for contingencies such as this, but none of those present ever having seen it in operation before, it created a sensation.

To Chirnside this was the climax of the whole of the 'ungentlemanly pwoceedings,' and turning

his back on the field of battle, he marched off (like Achilles) disgustedly to the tent. Scarlett, who by this time had recovered his nerve, stood gloomily and scornfully by. To his mind the whole thing was of a piece, and this not worse than the rest. It was all beneath contempt ; for whatever the result of Mr. Cornfoot's device may have meant to Jerry Ryan in the way of refreshment, it certainly did not add to the attractiveness of his appearance ; for, what with his bare skin, the water, and the blood, he looked a spectacle that one even less sensitive might have turned from in disgust.

However, neither man was satisfied, and went at it again and yet again ; and then, having pretty well exhausted themselves, they yielded to the solicitude of big Tom Johnson and one or two others of a more responsible type who were in the crowd and consented to shake hands. Honours were easy, each man was able to retire feeling himself a victor, and, as big Tom had prophesied, a couple of hours later they were the best of friends.

As for Scarlett, by the time the fight was over he was so disgusted, particularly with the principals, that his one desire was to see them go on and pound and batter each other into pulp ; for only thus, he felt, could they be adequately punished for what he regarded as their brutality.

However, their punishment came in another way. Up till that time both men had enjoyed the reputation of being a 'bruiser.' How or why they came by it were difficult to say, but for many a day both Ryan and O'Brien had been looked upon as 'good men with their hands,' and had gloried in all the kudos that comes from such a reputation in a camp full of men. But from that day

their glory departed for ever, for both, according to the report of the onlookers, had given such a poor and unscientific exhibition of the manly art that the very nippers and waterboys looked down upon them, and to men of their stamp this was punishment indeed.

When Scarlett returned to the tent he found Mr. Chirnside sitting on the bunk with his bell-topper pushed back from his forehead in a brown study. He had little to say, but he was thinking deeply, and it was clear that the conditions of life were not exactly according to his taste. After a time he raised his head and inquired when it would be possible to get a train back to Melbourne.

'There's a farmer driving over to San Remo this afternoon,' Scarlett replied, 'and you could get a lift there with him. There's a good hotel where you could stay to-night and get the boat to Stony Point first thing in the morning. How would that suit?'

'It would be the vewy thing,' Mr. Chirnside replied fervently. 'You see, Scarlett, he went on, 't-t-they told me in the office it would be wough, and I came pwepared to wough it; but, d-d-dash it all, there's a limit, and to my m-m-mind your navvies exceed that limit. I was hoping I might take up work of this chawacter myself, but I've weached the conclusion that my t-t-talents lie in another diwection.'

And so he gathered up his suit-case and went home. To Scarlett his visit had been a very welcome break, and indirectly it did him a great deal of good, for, once in the city, Chirnside made his way to headquarters, where he gave such an account of the wildness and savagery of the camp, and of Scarlett's sublime courage and fortitude,

that the latter came to be regarded as a hero ; and from that day many who had previously looked askance at the whole thing began to look upon him as a kind of beneficent Robinson Crusoe in the midst of a colony of cannibals, hourly risking his life for the sake of the cause.

CHAPTER XX

THE REAL AUSTRALIA

SUNDAY morning Scarlett was up with the birds, and with the joy of expectancy in his heart prepared the hall for the men.

He had an inexhaustible supply of literature, and although he well knew that no man had got properly through the half of what he had first set out, at the same time everything had been handled to a certain extent, and was more or less familiar, and he resolved to change it. Also, after thinking the matter out, he decided to change all the literature once a week, and furthermore, to make the change each Sunday morning. Sunday, being an off day, was to a great extent the most dangerous of all days —for Satan still, as in the time of Isaac Watts, finds mischief for idle hands to do—and it was necessary that each Sunday the hall should be at its brightest and best. So Scarlett went to work, and all the old literature was removed with the exception of the Saturday newspapers. Scarlett himself read too many newspapers during the week to care for them on Sunday, but the men were different. The papers did not arrive until late on Saturday night, and they would be keen to see them, and as he well knew, they might be worse employed. For the rest he resolved that, in addition to the new stuff, the Sunday output should

have as much of a Sunday flavour as he could give it with the means at his disposal.

Unfortunately, there are comparatively few religious papers that deem it worth their while to illustrate their columns, another proof of the saying that the children of this world are wiser than the children of light. But Scarlett did the best he could, and felt something of gratitude towards the editors of the *Christian Herald*, *Sunday Companion*, and papers of that stamp. Writing-paper and envelopes were set out in abundance, and with a barrow-load of the best English and American periodicals, and a pile of brand new sixpenny reprints of standard books, the place presented an irresistible attraction to every man whose mind was above the level of the beasts.

His next care was to make a selection from his stock for the women in the boarding-houses, whose lot it was to toil and slave, cook, and wash dishes, under heart-breaking circumstances, from early morning until late at night. It was just possible they might find time for a lie down on Sunday afternoon, and then these would be welcome. Here and there, too, a man was camped with his wife and children, and they were not forgotten, and when the various bundles were made up, including one for Mrs. Dingley, he went forth on his rounds.

It was characteristic of him to approach each place with as much diffidence and timidity as though he came to beg a favour instead of to confer a boon. Indeed, he felt more like a burglar going to commit a robbery than a Good Samaritan going to help his fellows. But, after all, his very bashfulness opened the way for him, for it is a quality not easily distinguished from gentleness, and in a community where bluster and bounce are often at a premium, gentleness of spirit in one in

authority is a welcome change. So Scarlett found open doors and smiles from the women and solitary families, where a man of more confidence might have been repulsed.

Having completed his rounds, he sought out Garfield, who promised to keep an eye on the hall, and then he was free to go, and went accordingly.

Leaving the camp behind him, he set off up the hill through the timber with a great elation in his heart, tempered only by a shrinking uncertainty and nervousness at the prospect of meeting Sheila MacDonald, supposing she were at the church.

The road from Woolamai runs south-east, and rises rapidly from the belt of timber which encircles the low-lying parts like a kilt into a country of clear grassy hills—the foothills, as a matter of fact, from which you rise, if going north, into the most mountainous country in Australia ; and the particular one up which Scarlett found his way is the last lone straggler, following like a calf in the wake of the mastodons that have gone up from the sea, to herd together in the wilds farther north.

When he had reached the summit he found that on either side the country fell away—on the right, to the deep waters of Westernport Bay, the future naval base and the finest port in Australia, lying comfortably behind Philip Island ; while jutting out from the south-east end of the island, and looking for all the world like an enormous whale making out to sea, was Cape Woolamai, the home of the mysterious mutton-birds. Scarlett gazed at the cape long and earnestly. The resemblance was striking, and while he watched, to heighten the illusion a column of smoke rose up from the head and curved back towards the land with the

wind. Almost involuntarily he shouted the cry of the old whalers, 'There she spouts !'

Right before him lay the trackless ocean, stretching clear away without a reef or land to the bergs that guard the Southern Pole, and with kindling eyes Scarlett watched the arrival of the long billows, rolling up from that boundless deep to wreck their pride on the iron rocks of Kilcunda. Their ceaseless roaring came to him clearly on the wind.

Far away to the left, Cape Patterson, running out like a wall into the water, bounded the view, but between Scarlett and the cape a long white beach stretched, upon which the green rollers rushed rank upon rank, like an army which no man could number, to the everlasting catastrophe of the shore. There their might and dominion ended, brought to naught by grains of sand. Thus, too, the rage and pride of man, careering over all the world, beats itself at length to an inglorious end on the shifting sands of Time.

It was such a day as is only to be had on the long south coast of Australia Felix, the sun shining in his might from a dome of blue ; vast titanic masses of cumulus clouds whiter than snow were piled up like Himalayan bergs of milk foam, and idled about the horizon or drifted majestically over the ocean of space. Out of the south and over the sea came a gentle wind to temper the heat, bringing with it the magic tang of ice and snow and the good salt sea. On such a day in such a place who could help quoting Stevenson? Not John Scarlett anyway.

'Far have you come, my lady from the town,
And far from all your sorrows, if you please,
To smell the good sea wind and hear the seas,
And in green meadows lay your body down.'

To see your pale face turn from pale to brown,
To see your eyes grow brighter by degrees.
Far have you come, my lady from the town,
And far from all your sorrows, if you please.'

He repeated the words with much mental smacking of the lips. They suited his case exactly, only the town from which he came was a rude camp, and the green meadows about him great rolling slopes of grass, not green nor brown, but of a good clean biscuit colour—well to look upon and smelling like new-cut hay. The scent of them rose up, tincturing the salt wind, and Scarlett drew it into his lungs in great gulps. It was not possible to have too much.

Scarlett looked long and with great appreciation on the main features of this far-flung panorama, and then with a deep breath turned curiously to see the route taken by the railway. His eyes followed the long, raw scar where it took its way, along the base of the hills, and hugging the last one closely, swept round due east and then along the coast. So far as he could determine, the platelayers had got to the engineer's camp near the creek at Kilcunda, and there an engine stood smoking, where a few days since there was nothing but a sandy road.

He could see the bridge at the Burnt Creek distinctly. Big Tom, he knew, was toiling terribly with his gang to have this bridge ready for the platelayers by the time they reached it. It was a neck and neck race between the gangs, but in the end Big Tom squeezed in a rivet or so ahead. The navvies, too, were just beyond, but holding their own and keeping their lead. Never had a line been built at such a pace. The languid Ferguson was working miracles.

Scarlett followed the line of the survey. It was easy to do so, for the white tents of the navvies were scattered, like bits of paper in the track of a paperchase, all the way to where a far-spreading splash of white marked the site of the rapidly growing canvas town of Wouthaggi, where the coalshafts were.

To-day a model city, electrically lit, and laid out with infinite care and taste in streets, crescents, esplanades, squares, and parks, stands where the tents then stood. There, too, are churches, theatres, and a complete water supply.

This city is humming with business, and echoes day and night to the rattle of winches and the roar of trains. Looking upon it in its completeness and substantiality, one feels that it must be many years since John Scarlett stood on the ridge and saw for the first time the canvas beginnings of it all. It is just a year. This is Australia.

To the peripatetic journalist, compassing earth and sea to find copy for a paper, or out for the good of his health, scurrying through Australia in a railway car, and taking cinematographic pictures from the window, or gathering up his facts from the various leg-pullers who may chance to share the compartment with him, it may seem that here is a race of sunshine people, without earnestness or purpose, working only when they play, and fully deserving the rod of censure, which he hastens of his charity to apply. But it were as well to remember that a ride in a train along a bit of the coastline of a country larger than the United States no more qualifies a man to speak with authority on that country, than a visit to Westminster makes him an authority on the British Constitution, or a stroll down Broadway upon the tangled politics of the State of New York.

Generally speaking, it is not upon knowledge thus acquired that sane men base their views. Nevertheless, it is mainly from authorities of this description that the world at large, listening in an idle moment, gathers such knowledge of Australia as it has. And yet, sunshine or shadow people, trifling or in earnest, the fact is that nowhere under the widespread canopy of the blue sky is there to be found a race who are more fully capable of bringing things to pass and achieving the impossible, when it is necessary, than this, and if proof were needed it is not far to seek.

Recent statistics show that, whether by work, by juggling, or by sleight of hand, the despised Australian produces more wealth per head of population than any other man in the whole world beside.

CHAPTER XXI

GOSSIP

BUT of these things John Scarlett had never a thought. It was his day of all days, and, like Pippa in Browning's story, he had risen early to get the most out of it that he could. This was the day that the Lord had made. He had waited for it ; and now that it had come in beauty, he would rejoice and be glad in it. And so, with the blue sky above, the flashing sea before, the caller wind in his face, and the good clean earth beneath him, he set off along the ridge to seek his friends at Mount Pleasant.

And well and fitly was the place named, as he found when at length he came there—the house cuddling down under the shoulder of the hill from the winter winds, as a swallow's nest in the eaves of a cottage, and looking out from its security over all the world below.

Father Christmas was in the act of backing Wilhelmina into the buggy when John arrived, and, leaving that sedate animal half in and half out, he greeted his visitor with enthusiasm.

'Come in, sir, God bless you ! Come in !' the cheery old gentleman cried, running to meet him. 'This way, sir, this way. Now, mother ! mother ! Where are you ? Here's Mr. Scarlett, half dead with the heat and his walk up the hill,

and just famish-ed for a cup of tea before we start for church.'

As Scarlett reached the door 'mother' came out to meet him. She was quiet and self-contained, in every way a contrast to her voluble spouse, but not less kind or pleased to see him. A cup of tea—most refreshing of drinks in hot weather!—was all ready, and after doing justice to it Wilhelmina was yoked to the trap, and the oddly assorted pair set out. 'Mother' was, for some reason, detained at home. The way for the most part lay along the backbone of a chain of hills, the slopes between dotted with farm-houses; magnificent views were to be had on either side, and with every mile of the way the enthusiasm of the old gentleman waxed stronger. He was irrepressible and, in a sense, irresistible.

By the time the church was reached Scarlett knew the name, denomination, and history of every farmer whose homestead was in sight. Evidently Mr. Dingley, like poor Weary World in Barrie's story, was the most sociable of men, with but few opportunities for a crack, and when one came he made the most of it.

Coming down the slope of the last hill towards the church, Scarlett ventured to ask him the question which had been uppermost in his mind and trembling on his lips ever since they left Mount Pleasant: Did Mr. Dingley know anything of the Bent Tree Mine, and, incidentally of course, of its manager? Of the manager's daughter he said nothing. For one reason, he could not trust himself to speak about her, and for another, he had wisdom enough to know that once the talk flowed in the direction of the MacDonalds it would be bound, sooner or later, to take her in.

'Know the Bent Tree Mine? God bless you,

sir ! Yes, I should think I did,' Mr. Dingley replied, removing his hat, and mopping his face with a great red-and-white handkerchief. 'I should think I did, sir,' he went on brightly. 'I don't mind telling you in confidence, Mr. Scarlett, that I've an interest in the Bent Tree Mine, and I make it my business to know about it.' And having said so much, Mr. Dingley laughed cheerfully.

Evidently the prospects of the Bent Tree Mine were of the best. As for the manager, it appeared that, if they were not exactly bosom friends, they were considerably more than acquaintances.

'And such a man, sir ! Talk about a manager—and organiser—one to get things done ! If that man had gone into the British Army, he would have made one of the greatest generals it ever possessed, he would ! Why—but bless my heart ! when I come to think of it,' the old gentleman said, looking round, 'his daughter is to sing at the anniversary this afternoon. And I will say this, Mr. Scarlett,' he went on, 'that although you may have in Melbourne more—ah—highly trained singers, I—ah—wiggle-me-dead, sir !'—with great emphasis—'if you've got more—ah—effective singers, or a sweeter singer ! She doesn't fix her eyes on the book ; she just stands there and looks right at you with those—ah—eyes of hers, and she—she sings it *right* into you, sir, as though she were—ah—pinning a rose in your coat ; and you can't take your eyes off her. And sometimes,' the good old gentleman continued, 'just towards the finish there'll be—well—just the ghost of a smile about her mouth, and no man, young or old, can withstand that smile. If I were a young man, Mr. Scarlett, and not married, and Mrs. Dingley had—ah—well, never been born, I'd

have married that girl or died in the attempt. I would, sir ! But God bless me, Mr. Scarlett ! Are you ill ? '

John Scarlett was not ill, but as he descended from the trap he was shaking with nervousness and almost incapable of joining the crowd of farming people who were thronging the door ; for 'that girl,' dressed in some filmy stuff that seemed a miracle of good taste, and carrying herself like a Queen of Sheba, had just gone up the steps, and, chancing to glance over her shoulder, had caught sight of Scarlett sitting in the buggy. There was a swift, surprised uplifting of the eyebrows, but whether in recognition, surprise, or disdain, Scarlett was too far away to tell ; but being the man he was, he concluded at once it was the last. Just why she should have disdained him he could not for the world have told—but self-consciousness takes no account of reason, nor seeks to justify itself.

And so it came to pass that, after Wilhelmina had been hitched to the fence, John made his way into the church—in some respects not unlike another humble-minded sinner of long ago. At all events, declining the chief seats, notwithstanding the remonstrances of his friend, he sat afar off in the back, and for some time afterwards dared not so much as lift his eyes to heaven—that is, to the beautiful face of Sheila MacDonald—but smote upon his breast (in a figurative sense) and cried in his heart of hearts, though not to God, 'Be merciful to me, a sinner ! '

Presently, however, he did raise his eyes, though timidly, and surveyed the scene. The place was decorated for the anniversary, and the choir seated upon the platform. A fair girl, with dreamy eyes, sat at the organ. The minister, clean-shaven,

young, eager, and good to look at, sat behind a low pulpit. But it was not for choir or minister that Scarlett looked—it was for Sheila MacDonald ; and presently, moving his head slightly to one side, he discerned her where she sat, a little apart from the others and by the organ. She was looking demurely down at her book, and in that attitude John thought her more beautiful than ever. But it is to be feared that this was only a phase of the malady from which he had begun to suffer, for had he been capable of taking so much note—which he was not—he would have observed that each time he cast his eyes upon her she seemed lovelier than before.

CHAPTER XXII

C O N C E R N I N G L O V E

BUT it is high time now to announce the fact—which presently came home to Scarlett himself with a wild, delirious pæan of thanksgiving—that by way of a navvy camp he had stumbled accidentally into heaven—in other words, he was helplessly in love.

Now, John Scarlett had been in love before, but there are degrees in love, and the love he had previously experienced was of that mild order known as calf love. Calf love, like measles, is incidental to youth, and, notwithstanding one or two drawbacks, is neither altogether disagreeable nor harmful. The one most concerned loses his sense of taste, it is true, and is more or less of a laughing-stock to his friends. Nevertheless, in both cases certain luxuries come his way which would otherwise be denied him ; and if reasonable care is taken by his parents or guardians, nothing of a deleterious nature is left behind, and he is rather better than worse for having had either one or the other—or both.

Scarlett, then, had been the way of his kind. He began by loving a woman twenty years older than himself, and a little later twenty women, sometimes two at a time, of all ages. Then, the

mild distemper having run its course, he settled down to the next phase, wherein he talked much and loudly against women.

The trouble now is that the eye of the boy develops out of all proportion to the rest of him, attaining its zenith, so to speak, while the other senses are only stirring into dawn. The result is that the eye, untempered by other and more kindly faculties, is compassing heaven and earth (so far as women are concerned) in search of physical perfection, and, it goes without saying, failing in the search. All women have their defects, disguise them how they will ; but, disguise them how they may, there is no disguising them from the eye of a boy at this stage of his life.

But the eye, having attained its meridian, declines in power, and the dominant place is taken by the affections. Well is it then for the youth if, when affection comes to lead him forth, seeking her own with open arms, the eye has not grown altogether dim, nor its natural force too far abated, for affection is ever purblind and apt to land him in a ditch.

John Scarlett had come without serious damage through the measly or calf stage of love, and, after his kind, had straightway plunged into the mild scepticism and diffidence which was as natural to his age as formerly the other had been. A perfect woman, who can find? John had looked long and critically, and certainly had not found her. Therefore, he concluded, she is not to be found, 'and I must go single and lonely all my days, for with less than perfection I could never be content.'

But being fond of reading, he read a great deal about love, for it is not possible to read far in

any direction without doing so, and such descriptions as he came across filled him with an intense longing to realise it for himself. But the kind of thing of which he read never came his way, and in the course of time he resigned himself to his fate. Such luxuries, he concluded, were not for him. And behold ! while he yet spake, all unrealised and unmarked, his eye grew dim, so to speak, and his heart (to use that term) awaked, and took supreme control of his life ; and while the eyes had sought only something to admire, his heart sought only some one to love.

This, then, was the condition of his mind when John Scarlett, quite unconscious of the mighty change that had taken place within himself, arrived at the Seventeen Mile. The guardian of his citadel, in whom he trusted, had fallen asleep, and his place had been taken by another, who was not so much a guardian as a host, flinging wide the door and calling softly upon all and sundry to come in and abide ; and or ever John was aware, the invitation was accepted, the citadel was taken, the castle sacked, and himself a prisoner. And he awoke to this amazing fact while sitting by the side of Father Christmas, looking shyly up at Sheila MacDonald upon the platform of the little church in the hills.

Many volumes have been written about love. Poets have made it their song, and about nothing have they sung so eloquently. Probably everything has now been said about it that can be said, and those of us who come after can only repeat the tale—with variations. But whether Scarlett's experience was a variation must be left to the reader to judge. The possibility, however, is admitted. It may be that, because Scarlett was sitting in a church, and therefore more in touch

with a remote and more truthful past, love took him how and where it did.

It is a polite fiction of our time that the heart is the seat of the affections ; the ancients, with more regard for truth, located it somewhat lower down, and they were right. And however much one may regret the shattering of a cherished fancy, yet loyalty to truth compels this writer to set forth the prosaic fact that love took John Scarlett, not in the heart but in the pit of the stomach, with the result that, not only was his breath considerably shortened, but what little was left him went out in gusts and sighs.

His appetite, as he presently found, went from him—another proof of the location of the grand passion, for appetite is not a thing of the heart. And as for his feelings, he experienced a strange, indescribable churning, a flinching and shrinking, together with a largeness and expansion and a kind of tossing in the region of the solar plexus, which he remembered to have felt once before in the days of his youth, when at a Sunday-school picnic he had ventured his life on a high swing. There was a moment, as he remembered, when, having reached the utmost height to which the swing would go, he hovered uncertainly before the downward sweep, and the feeling almost of nausea that he experienced when hanging upon nothing in the air came upon him now. However, it must be remembered that this, after all, was but the physical manifestation and not the thing itself.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LITTLE CHURCH IN THE HILLS

BUT now the organ is stirring in the voluntary and the minister is upon his feet giving out a hymn. Anon the hush of prayer falls upon them. And Scarlett can pray to-day as he has not prayed since the sweet beginnings of his faith in Christ ; for somehow, with this new glad experience he had come into closer touch and sympathy with God. It may be that hitherto he had been too introspective, and occupied with himself, but now—

‘Love took up the harp of life
And smote on all its chords with might,
Smote the chord of self, which, trembling,
Passed in music out of sight.’

And as a result he came closer to God and communed with Him.

After the prayer they settled back in their seats, while the minister read the lesson. It was the 103rd Psalm: ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.’ Then Miss MacDonald was announced to sing. As she came forward Scarlett shrank back in the corner, nor dared to look at her till her voice, full, round,

low, and sweet, broke upon his ear. It was an old, old hymn—

‘When I survey the wondrous cross,’

sung to the tune of ‘He wipes the tear from every eye.’ The words fitted the music exactly, and both words and melody might have been written for that voice.

John became conscious of a strained attention, and presently, greatly daring, ventured to look at her. It was as Mr. Dingley said. She sang as though she were speaking with each one face to face, and her manner probably accounted for her power as much as the purity of her voice. But, after all, with great singers as with great speakers and leaders of men, there is this and that and the other thing about them that may be set down in so many words ; but above and beyond all these, there is that which no man can define, and it is this indefinable birthright of the great that makes them what they are.

There was a great hush while she sang, so great that it seemed as though the fall of an eyelash might disturb it, and Scarlett sat, afraid almost to blink until it was over. Then he drew a deep breath and speculated as to the effect in the camp if ever she made good her word and came down there to sing.

The rest of the service Scarlett went through in a kind of dream. What the minister preached about he could not have told if his life depended upon it, though he was good enough to thank that gentleman cordially when the service was over.

But in the meantime he was tossed from side to side with hope and fear—hope that in some way they might be brought within speaking distance,

and fear of the consequences if they were. His fertile imagination conceived a thousand different situations in which they might conceivably be placed, and he constructed graceful and elaborate speeches to suit them all ; but a sinking sensation which made itself felt in the Mediterranean part of his anatomy (geographically speaking) as the service drew to a close, flung his fine thoughts into chaos and reduced him to misery. At one moment he hoped to escape meeting her altogether ; the next he feared that Mr. Dingley, in his eagerness to be off, might unhitch Wilhelmina and drive away before the others were out of the building.

So far, however, as Mr. Dingley was concerned there was no need for fear. Nothing was farther from the sociable old soul's intentions. A man who longs for the society of his fellows, and whose lot it is to be cut off from them for six days in the week, does not usually run away when the opportunity comes for a chat. Indeed, apart altogether from spiritual things, this was Mr. Dingley's feast-day, and with his protégé by his side, he quickly had a group of farmers, with their stalwart sons and comely daughters round about him, holding a kind of levee, in which John Scarlett was the great figure. Everybody who was anybody was introduced, and if there chanced to be somebody who was nobody, that one had a special introduction. Scarlett stood bareheaded, mechanically repeating, 'Glad to meet you,' 'How do you do, sir?' and such other variations of a formal greeting as in the confusion of the moment he could call to mind.

Presently the MacDonald family, who for some reason were the last to leave the church, came towards them. Mr. MacDonald, a spare man of medium height, with an unmistakable look of alert-

ness and capability about him, led the way, while his wife, a kindly, gracious-looking lady with enough of her youth left to show whence Sheila's beauty came, followed with her daughter.

Scarlett, directly he saw them, was filled with an almost irresistible desire to turn round and run for his life, but was prevented from doing anything so foolish by Mr. Dingley, who seized him by the arm and dragged him forward.

'Mr. MacDonald,' he began, 'allow me to introduce to you Mr. Scarlett, the—ah—gentleman who has taken up his quarters in the—ah—camp at Woolamai. Mr. Scarlett — Mr. MacDonald, manager of the mine.'

The manager shook hands cordially.

'I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Scarlett,' he said. 'I heard of your coming through Mr. Ferguson, and some of my fellows have been down at your camp of a night, and have told me of the good you're doing. But bless me!' he added, standing back and looking Scarlett up and down, 'you're not the holy terror you are said to be. I thought you were about six feet three and sixteen stone weight. You don't look at all terrible. Does he, Alison?'

Mrs. MacDonald smiled graciously as she in turn extended her hand.

'It's not always bulk that counts, is it, Mr. Scarlett?' she said. 'There's such a thing as the terror of the Lord.'

Now, Scarlett was not aware that he had any reputation in the camp or outside it, save possibly that of an amiable lunatic, and all this was just so much Greek to him; and consequently, not knowing what to say, he said nothing, but bowed, and tried to look unmoved, which of course was set down at once as reserve, another proof of the

strength of his character. A weaker man would have denied the soft impeachment, explained it, waved it aside. Scarlett, or so it seemed, accepted it as his due, and increased his reputation accordingly. ‘Even a fool,’ says the Good Book, ‘is counted wise if he holdeth his peace’—and, it may be added, even if he hold it for lack of sense to express himself.

But at this stage Mr. MacDonald suddenly bethought himself.

‘Why, I had forgotten to introduce Sheila. My little girl, Mr. Scarlett.’ (She was as tall as himself.) ‘Sheila, this is Mr. Scarlett, from the camp—“the Ganger” as I understand the men call him.’

Scarlett, speechless with the intensity of his feelings, bowed as stiffly as a major-general, but Sheila broke into a peal of merriment and extended her hand freely.

‘Why, father,’ she cried, ‘whatever are you thinking about? Didn’t you send me down to borrow books of Mr. Scarlett, and haven’t I been telling you about the way he sorted me ever since?’

‘What? Of course! To be sure! ’ the manager cried in some confusion. ‘Bless my soul! whatever have I been thinking about? Of course I did. You must excuse me, Mr. Scarlett,’ he added. ‘My memory is playing me tricks. But you’ll join us for lunch on the beach. It’s a good custom the folk hereabout have to bring their lunch to church and eat it on the beach afterwards. Mother, can you give Mr. Scarlett and Mr. Dingley a bite of something if they come down?’

But before Mrs. MacDonald could reply, Mr. Dingley broke in: ‘We’ve our own basket in the trap, sir, and knowing Mrs. Dingley as I do, I guess there’ll be more than enough. But

we'll be happy to join your party if you'll have us.'

'I'll agree,' Mrs. MacDonald responded, 'provided we club our lunches together. It's no way for friends to be eating separate lunches in the same group.'

Mr. Dingley was only too happy. Scarlett had committed himself to the stream, and was content to go whither it carried him. So the whole party, numbering a score or two, set off eagerly for the beach. At the foot of the high cliffs above the water-line they built a fire, and several billies were boiled; and, some on the sand, some on the rocks, and some on seats of driftwood, all sat down together, grace was sung, and the meal began.

'I'll put you between father and Mr. Dingley,' Sheila had said to Scarlett when they began to take their places. 'You'll enjoy that better because they are men, and you'll be safe from us women! Mr. Scarlett doesn't like women,' she added for the benefit of the others, who turned with expressions of astonishment at her remark. 'He told me so himself. You can't deny it,' she went on, as Scarlett, red as a lobster, began some sort of explanation. 'You know you did.'

'Yes,' Scarlett began, 'but—'

'It's no use, Mr. Scarlett. When I asked you why you disliked women you said you couldn't help it—now, didn't you?'

'Yes, but—'

'No "buts" please. Just sit there, and you'll be safe.'

For the rest of the meal John sat trying to invent a plausible explanation, but by the time it was ready lunch was over and the party had broken up.

CHAPTER XXIV

JOHN'S ONE TALENT GETS A CHANCE

IT may be assumed with confidence that the reader whose patience has enabled him to so far follow the fortunes of this Knight of the Twentieth Century will by now have reached the conclusion that John was a young man of very ordinary clay, and that any success he had achieved or was likely to achieve was due rather to that Providence which is said to keep a particular eye upon drunkards, children, and fools than to any outstanding quality of his own.

Nevertheless, there was one thing that John did supremely well—and, so far as the present writer is aware, only one—he could swim like a seal. Nor was this singular when one remembers that the old West Victorian town where he spent his early days lay right on the banks of a river, the Glenelg, and in John's time the boys of the town could swim almost as soon as they could walk. John was a natural swimmer, and his powers, cultivated in the river since childhood, had been perfected in the wide reaches of the Swan and the lazy, fickle, beautiful waters of the Indian sea at Fremantle, until, among a race that produces most of the champions, he had few equals.

Lunch over, the party broke up into little groups and scattered here and there about the

shore. Sheila went off alone. John followed her every step with his eyes, and would gladly have followed on his feet, for he was madly in love with her and eager to put himself right. Perhaps she went off alone to give him the opportunity he desired ; but he was too nervous, and not yet sure of his ground, and besides, Mr. Dingley and her father insisted that he come with them to a bluff whence they could see all around, and held him talking there. Right before them, offering a bulwark to the fury of the waves, was a level but broken plateau of rock some acres in extent. The tide was coming in, and ever and again a wave, gathering momentum from afar, would outdo all the others, and, surmounting the height, pour tons of flashing water over the edge. At high tide the whole would be covered.

At the extreme end of this plateau, and on the western edge, there stood a point some three feet higher than the remainder, and to this point Sheila had bent her steps and was now seated upon it watching the wild flurry of water below.

' It's a magnificent coast,' Mr. Dingley began, though with less vivacity than usual, when they were seated, ' but somehow I never feel too safe about it. It's what you might call—ah—treacherous. The waves will come in for hours and break with almost monotonous—ah—regularity, and then when you have settled down in what you think is a perfectly safe place, quite beyond their reach, suddenly for no—ah—conceivable reason one will rise up feet higher than any of its fellows and swamp you, and you're lucky if you're not carried out to sea and drowned, as many a good man has been. I remember—'

But the old gentleman's story was never told, for at that moment the very thing of which he

spoke came to pass. The two visitors listening to him had instinctively begun to search the water for indications of the thing he was describing, and at that juncture both rose suddenly to their feet, Mr. MacDonald with his pipe half-way to his mouth. Simultaneously shrieks and cries arose from the people scattered about as they fled incontinently towards the shore.

What Scarlett and the manager saw was a dark level line upon the sea, like a wide strip of ribbon drawn over the surface, and rushing shorewards with incredible swiftness and stealth. As the meaning of it became clear they stood appalled with horror, then from the father's lips there burst a groan of agony.

'My God !' he cried in despair, 'Sheila is lost !'

Sheila had been watching the water about her, thinking dreamily the long, pleasant thoughts of youth, when the screams and shouts of warning aroused her, and, looking out to sea, all too late realised her danger. Even then she might have escaped with a drenching if she had sat where she was and clung to the rock, for only the crest of the wave passed over it, but in her terror she leaped down and began to run to shore, but scarce had gone a dozen yards when, with a roar of fury, the great green monster leaped upon her. There came to the watchers a cry of terror. Mr. Dingley shut his eyes. The father watched like a man transfixed, and drew a breath through his teeth with a loud sibilant s-s-s as of one in agony. John Scarlett darted down the hill, flinging off his clothes as he went.

Had the wave come straight to shore, Sheila might have escaped even then with a few cuts and bruises, or at worst a broken limb ; for its

fury was broken by the wall of rock, and the backwash would not have been sufficient to have taken her out to deep water. But, as it happened, the wave did not come straight. It swirled across the rock, and, lifting up its victim, whirled her over the side in a frightful welter of foam into the terrible depths below.

Scarlett reached the spot in less than twenty seconds, yet even then the last of the wave was going down the side in a thousand delicate transparent cascades of foam, as though the whole long edge of rock had been hung with a network of curtains of the daintiest lace. But Sheila was nowhere to be seen. The father was at his side instantly, peering frantically into the riot of water below for some sign of his loved one. In his agony he would gladly have plunged in to seek her, but, alas ! it were worse than useless, for he could not swim a stroke. The crowd, filling the air with their lamentations, straggled across the intervening space towards them, and in their midst the distracted mother.

John was not less eager in his search than Sheila's father, but all the same he lost no time in getting rid of his boots and shirt.

'It's death to venture in there,' some prudent soul advised. But John's reply was : 'If she comes up, I'll take her round to that bit of beach. Be ready there to pull us ashore.'

Then a shout of 'There she is !' rose from a dozen throats, and there she was indeed, about forty yards away, lifted a moment on the crest of a boiling wave, her beautiful hair washing like seaweed about her face. A second later Scarlett's slim figure flashed down from the rock like a streak of light, hit the water at a perfect angle, and when he arose was far on his way to where

the girl was feebly beating with her hands. She could swim a little, but was weighted down by her clothes, and it was only a matter of seconds till she sank.

To most of the onlookers the powerful trudgeon stroke was a thing unknown, and the torpedo-like fashion in which Scarlett drove himself through the water was to them something in the nature of a miracle. But, quick as he was, she sank ere he could reach her. He dived the same instant, and, rightly gauging the direction, they came together under the water, and grasping her by her clothes, he brought her to the surface. But Sheila was now in the grip of water fear, and, flinging her arms about his neck, half-choked him, and they disappeared again, overwhelmed by a great wave. Scarlett struggled under water like a madman to release himself, and, there being nothing but his bare skin to which she could cling, contrived to manage it as they rose again.

'Let go! Let go!' he roared. 'You'll drown the pair of us! I'll save you—if you—don't catch hold!'

He might as well have begged the sea to stop its striving; she clutched him again, but this time Scarlett had his wits about him, and, lifting himself up in the water, struck her a blow across the cheek with his open hand that, even in the wild, white fury of that terrible sea, brought her to some degree of sense, and she subsided. The next instant she was being dragged through the water by the hair of the head like a little boat in the wake of a powerful tug.

CHAPTER XXV

ASTOUNDING BEHAVIOUR OF JOHN

MEANWHILE the crowd upon the rock, watching the drama in the water, had grovelled in an agony of despair and mounted on wings of hope as eagles, as the rescuer seemed to fail or succeed. When Sheila sank ere Scarlett reached her, there was a cry of despair, and women covered their faces with their hands. When half a minute later both heads reappeared, there was an exulting shout of 'He's got her ! '

When it was seen that the girl was struggling with her rescuer despair prevailed, and when they went down, men gave up hope, and said, 'She's drowned them both.' Later on their grief turned into frantic joy when they both again appeared. But when Scarlett was seen to strike the girl in the face, few knew what to make of it. Was he beating her off to save himself? It seemed so. 'Oh! the monster!' However, when at last they saw him making shorewards, dragging the girl after him, there arose above the roar of the sea a cry of admiration and of thankfulness to God.

The majority, the father amongst the first, then turned and ran for the little strip of beach, far to their right, where Scarlett had told them he would land. But the mother, standing with some of the elder women and a group of navvies, who,

unaware of what had happened, had just joined them, strained her eyes in an agony to watch.

The navvies were all excitement to know particulars.

'Who are they?' they demanded.

'Miss MacDonald and Mr. Scarlett,' some one replied.

'The Ganger?'

'Yes.'

'Oh! He'll never be able to do it,' the mother, whose eyes were on the swimmers, broke in.
'He'll never do it! They'll both be drowned!'

'Don't you make any mistake about that little man, missus,' one of the navvies assured her in great excitement. "'E's the greatest take-down you ever seen in your life. I wisht I was as sure of a pension as I am that 'e'll get ashore all right. W'y, 'e come into the billiard-room at the pub at Nyora one night an' knocked Bill McGrar 'ead over tip on to the table, and—'

But the watchers were too intent upon what was taking place before them to listen to any story, however interesting, and presently, when Scarlett was seen to drag his charge up on what appeared to be a little flat, weed-covered islet, almost level with the water, that lay half-way to shore, and sink beside her on it apparently exhausted, the mother's fears broke out afresh.
'He'll never do it!' she cried in despair. 'He'll never do it!'

Again it was the navvy who restored her confidence.

'Don't you worry, mum. He'll do it alright. It's too far away to make out wot 'e's doin' or wot 'e looks like, but I'm game to bet my shirt 'e's only gettin' 'ees wind.'

And as it happened he was right. It was well

that the islet lay where it did, otherwise it is questionable if they had ever come ashore alive. Scarlett, swimming on his back, had not noticed it, until a huge wave lifted them in a tangle of clinging seaweed almost on top of it. Instantly he grasped a long piece of kelp, and then, waiting for the lift of the water, dragged his charge across the rock, and for a moment they lay there gasping.

And then a strange thing happened, and in some respects an incredible thing. Apparently something of what John Scarlett felt in his heart towards her passed into Sheila's mind, and as they lay amid the thunder of the sea, looking into each other's eyes, heart answered to heart as face to face in a glass, and each was aware of the thoughts of the other. Deep called unto deep amid the noise of waterspouts ; but although all the waves and billows were going over them, yet the grand passion of life proved stronger than the fear of death, and even in that tempest of water they could think of love. But there was no time to dwell upon it.

Scarlett, nervous and shrinking when all was well, now, confronted by a situation that would have appalled Achilles, was calm and calculating, and had an eye to everything.

' In five minutes, dear,' he cried, with his mouth at her ear, ' the sea will be over this rock ; we must go, but I'll take your boots off first.'

The girl made no demur. For one thing she was half unconscious with the shock and buffeting she had received and the bellowing of the water round about her, for their islet seemed the centre of a storm. But apart from that, John was just then a very masterful man. He knew what was best, and would do it no matter what she might

say. He was a Goliath, after all. So her boots came off and went into the sea. But John had not yet done.

'You must get rid of that jacket and skirt,' he shouted. She looked at him helplessly, but with consent in her eyes, and he somehow dragged them off, and they went the way of the boots.

Then he stood up and measured the distance to the shore with his eye, and the chances of getting there. It would be a bigger fight than he had thought when he set out, and possibly . . . he had to stoop then to shield the girl as a great wave slopped across the rock and almost swept them away. There was no time to lose, for the higher the tide the rougher the sea ; but he had got a second wind now, and was ready. Sheila, too, was ready. But always on these coasts the sea rises by fits and starts, and between the tops of the highest waves there is a lull, and in it Scarlett, his soul aflame, knelt beside her.

'Sheila,' he cried, 'we must go, and God only knows if we shall reach the shore, and in case we do not—I want to say what I would not have said for many a day—Sheila, I love you with all my heart, and if I can't save you, I will die with you. I could die gladly,' he added, 'if I knew my love might ever be returned.'

Without hesitation a dripping hand went out to him. 'I could love you very dearly'—and after a pause, with a ghost of her old smile—'John.'

It was enough. He bent his head, and their lips met in a kiss that thrilled them through and through and set the warm blood flowing in spite of the drenching spindrift and the cold salt sea. Then John rose up in the might of his great possession, and something he had from his Highland mother woke within him like a second sight.

'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it,' he cried. 'So come, dear, trust yourself to me, and we shall not die, but live to declare the works of the Lord. I could take you ashore in safety,' he shouted in his might, 'though it were twice as far, and every wave a Niagara.'

And the girl believed him and committed herself wholly to him, and so he was her saviour. It was a desperate battle, and had not strong hands dragged them from among the breakers and the fearful backwash on the steep beach, they had never come ashore alive. But there they were at length, safe on the warm sand, the girl unconscious and the man too exhausted to speak.

But Scarlett's work was not yet finished. Sheila was half drowned and might yet die ; for no one in the crowd knew what to do, not even her father ; and there the Y.M.C.A., with its ambulance classes and first-aid training, came in, and the half-drowned Scarlett, because of the Association and what it had taught him, was worth more than the twenty stalwart men who stood around. Stimulated by some brandy, which (and such is the irony of things) one of the navvies had purchased surreptitiously at a shanty and had been taking to his tent when he was drawn to the beach by seeing the crowd, Scarlett gave directions. The others carried them out, and presently the girl sighed and opened her eyes. They made her more comfortable, and for a time she lay content, her head in her mother's lap and her father just by on hands and knees looking anxiously into her face, with the crowd in the background melting with tenderness.

But presently she started, and shuddering vio-

lently, lifted herself up and gazed wildly from side to side. Her mother bent over her.

'What is it, dear?' she asked.

'Where's John?' the girl asked faintly.

'John? What John?' the mother asked, looking inquiringly at her husband.

The father bent down. 'Is it Mr. Scarlett, lassie?'

'Yes,' she whispered; 'is he safe?'

'Yes, he's right as houses—has just gone away to change.'

Her head sank back again peacefully on her mother's breast and her eyes closed. Then, when she had rested a little, the women of the party carried her away to the little cave under the cliff. There a kind of collection was made of such garments as could be spared amongst them, and then they stripped her and dried her, and dressed her amid great laughter (but it was not far removed from tears) in a medley of garments contributed to by old and young, and when this was done they brought her out again. The men carried her to the top of the cliff, where a buggy was waiting, and there they safely placed her.

There, too, on the cliff was Mr. Dingley, with the gay Wilhelmina, all ready waiting for John Scarlett; and there, also, was John, with white face and bloodshot eyes, dressed ridiculously in a pair of blue dungaree trousers designed for a navvy of twenty stone weight, so that at sight of him Sheila had to smile in spite of her weakness; and, John's eyes alighting a moment on the odds and ends in which she was dressed, he was fain to smile back. But he was terribly exhausted, and it was all he could do to walk to the buggy where she sat. People noticed, too, that although no word was spoken their hands lingered together

and their eyes grew dim as they parted. But not thus silently could the father and mother let him go. Mr. MacDonald placed his hands on John's shoulders and looked into his eyes.

'I don't know what to say to you, Mr. Scarlett—in Gaelic I could say it fery well ; but you're a man—a—a great man, and you can do things. We lost our boy. He wass a man like you, and he would be your age, and if— But Sheila iss all we haf, and if we had lost her—'

The manager could say no more. His eyes were dim and his throat full, but he grasped Scarlett by the hand and wrung it, and then turned aside to hide the tears that came to his unaccustomed eyes.

Then the mother came, and taking his hand fervently in both hers, 'God bless you, my boy !' she said, looking steadily into his eyes. 'God always bless you ! Your mother will be a happy woman to have such a son. I should like to know her.'

It was John's turn to melt now.

'I have no mother,' he said with a break in his voice.

'Poor boy ! Well, if ever there's anything that only a mother can do for her boy and you require it done, come to me. You've brought me back my child from the dead, and what one woman can do for another woman's son I'll do for you.'

'It was nothing,' John replied unsteadily. 'I—I like swimming.'

The mother shook her head at him, but fondly, and then turned away and entered the trap beside her daughter. A slim white hand waved a feeble farewell, and they were gone.

Strong hands helped John into the trap. Wilhelmina put her best foot foremost, and soon

he, too, was away, very weary, very quiet, but supremely happy. He had had a great day—the greatest day of his life. He had only to shut his eyes, and he was again on the rock with the spindrift flying—the one woman in the world in his arms, and she was saying: ‘I could love you very dearly—John.’

* * * * *

But amongst the group who watched him drive away, a stout navvy was going about to establish his own righteousness.

‘Wot did I tell you?’ he was saying. ‘Isn’t ’e a take-down? Wot about the way ’e brung ’er in through that sea?’

‘That’s nothin’,’ one of the farmer’s boys responded. ‘You should ’a seen the clout ’e give ’er over the jaw! ’

CHAPTER XXVI

HOME FROM THE PLAY

SCARLETT had looked forward with great expectancy to the first Sunday evening service. He had advertised it night by night, and emphasised the fact that it would be strictly undenominational ; but notwithstanding all, the men proved shy. The great majority of them were Roman Catholic, and Scarlett was a Protestant. That was sufficient. Only a handful came, and probably under the circumstances, it was as well. Scarlett himself, by reason of his gruelling in the sea, was totally unfit to do the service justice. Indeed, had it not been for the kindness of the genial Mr. Dingley, no service would have been possible at all. He, however, with cheerful generosity, had insisted upon driving Scarlett right to the camp, and, when there, was nothing loath to remain and take the meeting.

The manner of service to be held had caused Scarlett a great deal of thought, but in the end he decided that, for the most part, it should consist of singing, the hymns used being those made popular by that prince of song-leaders, Mr. Charles Alexander. Mr. Dingley was well qualified to lead a meeting of this character, and conducted it in a manner all his own. The Bishop was at the organ, and what men came thoroughly enjoyed

themselves, and returned to their tents when it was over to tell their mates. Scarlett was not disappointed at the attendance. As a matter of fact, he was too weary to care a great deal about anything, save one thing only. He was longing for the quiet of his sleeping-tent that he might give himself up to thoughts of Sheila.

As a general thing he read himself to sleep ; but to-night no book, not even his beloved Stevenson, could hold his attention for three minutes, and after prayer he turned his light out and lay with a great rapture in his soul, living over and over those priceless moments on the rocks, thrilling to the ravishing touch of Sheila's lips, and hearing again with an ecstasy approaching delirium the accents of that sweet voice, saying, 'I could love you very dearly—John.'

He slept at last, but his sleep was far from refreshing. All night long he was fighting the waves, and every now and again would awake in an agony of fear that he would never bring his loved one to the shore.

'We are always going in the play or coming home from it,' says Dickens somewhere, in his subtle fashion, and John Scarlett had been to the play with a vengeance : he had seen drama of a thrilling character, almost high tragedy, and then had come prosaically home, and awoke the following morning flat-spirited and ill at ease. It is odd, too, how the devil of misgiving will turn the things that made most for our happiness when at the play into the chief causes of our gloom when the play is over and done. So it came to pass that Sheila's soul-thrilling words, 'I could love you very dearly—John,' that last night had been the Open Sesame to his house of sweet dreams, were to-day the chief cause of his despair.

'For after all,' the black imp whispered to his jaded spirit, 'after all, what did she say? What was there to build upon?' What indeed?

Last night they had seemed to mean 'I love you, John, and will love you for ever,' but that was plainly a delusion. She had not committed herself in the least. Any one in similar circumstances might say the same. His rejoicing had been without foundation, and, lacking foundation, fell headlong in dreadful ruin at the first breath of calm reflection. It was as much a thing of his highly-strung body as of his soul, of course, and due mainly to his superhuman battle with the sea. But who that is young ever took account of these things!

By and by another and far more serious reflection came. Had he not taken advantage of her helplessness out on the rock to force his attentions upon her? What must be her thoughts concerning him this morning? This reflection stung him like the bite of a whip. What would her parents think when they learned that he had spoken to her, whom he had scarcely spoken to at all, of love, and under such circumstances?

Scarlett was all alone when this thought took shape; nevertheless, his eyes fell abashed and he flushed crimson with shame. Poor John! That morbid conscience of thine doubtless serves a useful purpose in keeping thee humble, but one cannot but feel that some more agreeable method might have been devised; for a morbid conscience is a very Gideon in its use of thorns for purposes of flagellation, and the time-serving men of Succoth, smarting with pain after the scourging that rough patriot gave them, probably felt easy and comfortable compared with John. The more he thought of it, the more unpardonable his con-

duct seemed to be, until at length he became divided in opinion as to whether he should clear out of the district at once and never be seen in it again, or go up to the camp, sue for pardon on his knees, and plead in extenuation that the buffeting of the water had temporarily deranged him, and he was not accountable for his actions. In the midst of these deliberations Mr. MacDonald appeared at the door.

John's first impulse was to bolt out at the back, but a second—upon which he acted—was to go forward and make the best of a poor business. He did so, and one thing at once became clear—Sheila's father was still disposed to be friendly. If he knew of John's extraordinary behaviour he said nothing about it. His greeting was warmly affectionate, and no father could have been more solicitous for Scarlett's health.

' You're sure there's no ill result? ' he inquired anxiously.

John was quite sure, as witness his going about his work as usual. Mr. MacDonald was much relieved to hear it. They had all been very anxious about him, it seems (John began to feel better), and there was no peace until he came personally to inquire.

' You see, you're such a handful, Mr. Scarlett. You're a fair height, but there's so little of you other ways. What do you weigh now? '

' Nine stone eight.'

' Exactly ; and you look as though any exertion would kill you, and yesterday the strain must have been terrible.'

Scarlett affirmed, with an air that said the thing was to him very ordinary indeed, that it was nothing at all to a fairly good swimmer, and he was fairly good.

' You are that,' the mine manager answered admiringly. ' I never saw such a swimmer.'

John glowed delightedly. Mr. MacDonald was evidently a man of discernment. But still he was not at ease, for he was trying to bring himself to ask after Sheila, but could not trust his voice to pronounce her name. At length, however, he blurted out some form of inquiry, and learned, to his unspeakable relief, that Sheila, though very shaky as regards her legs, and white as regards her face, and rather quiet as regards her manner, was doing remarkably well.

' And we've had rare fun with her this morning, Mr. Scarlett, about that smack in the face you gave her.' (John shuddered.) ' My leddie usually has her own way with everybody, and we've been telling her she had met her master at last. Ay,' the wise father went on, ' and it's an odd thing, but I've noticed that men of your stamp, who don't care a bodkin about them, always have the greatest power over women.'

The subduer of women made no reply, and the father concluded—

' But I must not forget my business. I'm ordered to invite you up to the camp to-morrow night for tea. We know you'll have to be away back to your meeting at night, so come early—say four o'clock. We have tea about half-past five. You'll manage that?'

Scarlett would be only too happy.

' Well, that's good,' the manager said cordially. ' I'll tell them how you are, but they won't be satisfied till they see you for themselves. But this iss a wonderful place you haf here.'

And then Scarlett must needs show him what there was to be seen, and this done, Mr. MacDonald, much impressed, took his departure,

When he had gone much of John's gloom had gone, too. For some time he sat on the end of a form deeply engrossed in thought, and when eventually he rose to his feet, it was with an exclamation.

'It seems to me,' he muttered, 'that I've been taking everything, myself included, a bit too seriously, and that most of my troubles are imaginary troubles.'

He was not yet out of the wood, but the trees were thinning out, and his spirits rose to Alpine heights as he contemplated the visit to the MacDonald camp.

He stood a moment thinking, then he crossed to the writing-table and dashed off a letter. There was nobody in camp to whom he might tell his great joy, and some one he must tell or burst, so he began a letter to a friend in the Central State. This friend, for the reason probably that he had cultivated an appearance of unsmiling grimness to hide the womanly tenderness of his heart, of which he was somewhat ashamed, was known to his intimates as 'Sunshine,' and it was thus Scarlett addressed him.

'SEVENTEEN MILE CAMP,
'Feb. 4th.

'MY DEAR SUNSHINE,—I want your biggest and heartiest congratulations! I am not in *need* of anybody's good wishes, but I covet those of my friend. The fact—the great, impossible, actual fact is, that I have found my ideal at last, and if there is a happier man out of heaven, then he ought to be kept under lock and key, lest he do something not permitted by sane people.'

'Oh, Sunshine, my friend! I am just hopelessly, absurdly happy. God only knows what

this joy is to me after so many years of mere dull anticipation of lonely bachelorhood. It is simply unthinkable joy. I go along the road like any other sane creature, but the very trees and fences seem to laugh at me. But *she* is real and beyond my wildest dreams of goodness and beauty, and God will give grace as He has given glory, and will keep us—*us*, Sunshine!—by His own power. Pray for us, my brother, that we may not forget Him in this joy of His own bestowing. And oh! pray for me that I may, by God's grace, be made less unworthy of my love.

‘God bless you.

‘Yours, in Heaven's own atmosphere,
‘JOHN SCARLETT.’

John was going to another play, and his expectations, notwithstanding past experience, ran as high as ever. Human nature, it would seem, is incorrigibly optimistic, and whoso is wise and will observe these things will thank God that it is.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PROBLEM OF THE ' PILGRIM '

IT was a different man who went about the tent now. Gloom had given place to good spirits, and listlessness to energy. He was polishing away at a lamp-glass, and at intervals holding it up to the light and seeing Sheila's face in it. He was singing, too, after his fashion, one of the popular songs of the camp :—

' Good-night, my Starlight ! heart of my heart !
You'll be my star bright, though we're far apart ;
And when I'm lonely, my heart's delight !
Dream of your true love. Good-night, Starlight !'

' Starlight ' in this case was, of course, Sheila, and Scarlett was making up in intensity what he lacked in voice as he sang, when a stranger came along.

It was Scarlett's business to entertain strangers ; that is to say, when a man came along looking for a job Scarlett made it his business to look after him and see that he lacked nothing until the job was secured and the man able to look after himself, and in some respects this was one of the best features of his work.

It may be that a man is out of work in the

city, when he hears that men are wanted in a certain camp. The Labour Bureau will furnish him with a ticket to convey him as far as the railway runs, but nothing besides. The man arrives in the camp, perhaps at midday. The bosses are all away until night-time, and he must wait till they return. He has, in the majority of cases, no money, no food, no shelter. What can he do? What would you do, clever reader?

Bill sits down by the track and chews stems of grass to stay his stomach, and waits, and waits. There is nothing else to do, and it is a weary business.

But that is not all. The bosses return. Poor Bill waits deferentially until they have had tea, then he approaches them. If he has luck, he is told he may go to work next day. His name is entered up and he receives a ticket, which entitles him to a shovel and a tent—at a price, to be deducted from his first pay ; for these things Bill must buy.

But he is badly needing food. Surely he may get a shilling or two to buy a 'feed,' as he calls it, or at least get an order on a storekeeper for such food as he requires. Not at all. After he has done a day's work he may apply for a 'sub.' and get it, but not before. So poor Bill, who has had no food for a day, is faced with the prospect of another day's fast, in which he must swing a shovel and keep up with the pace of the well-fed men beside him. There is a way of getting over the difficulty, of course, and with average luck he may do it. This is the method. He makes his way to some tent where a man is having tea, and boldly proposes that he shall join in. It is a miracle if he is refused, and so he makes good, after his kind.

But is this worthy a sane, humane, to say nothing of a wealthy Christian community? Is it not rather culpable negligence of a paramount duty on the part of the employer, the Government in this case, and crass stupidity at that?

Bill himself, lying by the track in the sun, waiting with hunger gnawing at his vitals, or gingerly approaching the fire of a perfect stranger to 'cadge' (his word) enough food to keep body and soul together until his day's work entitles him to a 'sub.', feels it to be unjust.

'Something wants altering,' he says to the man whose bread he is eating. The man agrees with him, and adds that it's a damn shame that human beings should be treated so. Comes to them presently some revolutionary candidate for Parliament, and says, 'Put me in Parliament, and I'll see that this is altered, and such a thing impossible in the future.' And if Bill and his mate promise their vote, and when the time comes give it, who can blame them?

He who writes these words has but little faith in Socialism as a panacea for our economic ills, but in Bill's position he would reason as Bill does, and vote his ticket. 'The God that answers by fire,' said Elijah, 'let Him be God.' 'The God that answers by orphanages,' said Spurgeon, 'let Him be God.' And, similarly, 'the political party that answers by humanity to all the toilers,' says Bill, 'let that be the power in this fair land.'

That party has yet to appear. But in the meantime Bill takes this or that at its word and on its own valuation, and slaves and votes to give it pride of place.

Here, then, was where Scarlett's usefulness began to be manifest. He was not brilliant, but he loved his fellows, even when he found them

in the rough. Love has ever an eye in her head for the sufferings of others, and it was not long before the sufferings of the 'pilgrims' became plain to Scarlett ; and, once plain, he soon found a way to relieve them. So the old order changed, giving place to a new and better.

And now it comes to pass that when the 'pilgrim' arrives in camp, half a dozen of him a day (or a dozen, may be), and, flinging his swag by the track, sits down to his weary wait, there comes to him presently one whom he takes for a budding engineer or a clerk in the office of the paymaster.

'Waiting for the boss?' this individual asks in the laconic fashion of the camp.

'Yes,' says Bill. 'Wot time'll 'e be back?'

'Sundown.'

Bill groans aloud as the prospect of the weary hours opens up before him.

'Going to wait?' the other asks presently.

'Wot can I do?' Bill would know.

'Well, then,' says Scarlett, 'you'd better come over to the tent and wait there. It's cool, anyhow, and you'll find papers and things to read.'

Bill needs no second invitation. He gathers up his swag, and together they make for the tent. Presently—

'Had dinner?' Scarlett asks.

Now, Bill doesn't care to admit his indigence right away, and—

'That's all right,' he says, and adds, 'by cripes! but it's a scorcher to-day, isn't it?'

'No, but have you?' Scarlett persists.

'Well, to tell you the truth, mate,' Bill admits, looking slowly all round the horizon and wiping the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand, 'I'm fair on me uppers. I haven't 'ad a bite since last night,'

'Well,' says Scarlett, 'there's some tea in my billy and some tucker in the box; you'd better come and have some.'

Bill comes, and for the rest of the afternoon, what with a lovely sleep in the shade on a full stomach, reading the papers in the tent, and playing quoits with the others who are there on the same quest as himself, the afternoon goes so quickly that the boss is back long before Bill expects him, and the rest is easy. Bill returns radiant.

'It's all right,' he says. 'I'm to go on in the mornin'.'

Scarlett seems just as pleased as Bill.

There is still, however, the difficulty about food for to-night and to-morrow. It's no use going to the store. The storekeeper has been 'scaled' so often that he will trust nobody.

'Well,' says Scarlett, 'how much would it cost to set you up?'

Bill reckons it up, and 'About four or five bob,' he replies.

'Well,' Scarlett says, 'if you give me an order on the paymaster for five shillings, I'll give you an order on the storekeeper for goods to that amount.'

Bill is amazed at such generosity, but closes with the offer on the spot. Whereupon Scarlett writes out two orders. The first reads—

'PAYMASTER, Seventeen Mile Camp.
Please pay John Scarlett 5/-'

It is very brief, but the paymaster understands it perfectly, and will honour it so soon as Bill's signature is attached. Bill signs it with as much ceremony as if he were signing a will.

The second order reads—

'Mr. O'LEARY, Storekeeper.

'Please give bearer goods up to the value
of 5/-

'And oblige,

'JOHN SCARLETT.'

This Bill takes to the store, and his troubles are over.

But this is not all. It is one thing to earn money and another—with shanties and two-up schools about—to keep it. This was brought home forcibly to Scarlett the day preceding the first pay-night.

Just before close-up time a man known felicitously as 'Fat Jack,' probably for the reason that he was as thin as a cab-horse, approached Scarlett rather shamefacedly, and, after much preliminary humming and ha-ing, delivered himself thus—

'Look 'ere, Ganger. To-morrow's our pay-day, an' there's no use tryin' to 'ide it, I'm foolish with money. If I try to keep mine over Sunday, every scuttacher will be blewed in the shanties, an' there'll be nothin' to send home. So, if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to come over 'ere as soon as I get paid, an' hand the money over to you for my wife, an' then it'll be right. Do you mind?'

Scarlett did not mind. He was there to help the men and save their money from the shanties, and would as soon do it that way as any other. Thus began the banking business, and in a little time he began to be so loaded up with money that he feared to sleep in the tent by himself; and, after thinking it over, put in a second bunk, and persuaded Garfield, the ex-Salvation Army man, to come and occupy it.

Later on Bill finds other benefits. It is payday, and he wants to send some money to the wife. How is it to be done? Hitherto he has had to trust to luck, or the butcher, or the store-keeper, or one of the pay-clerks, or somebody going down the line, and all the time with the feeling that they may not be trustworthy and the whole thing a lottery.

But one of Scarlett's first moves was to set up a post-office, and all Bill has now to do is to sit down at Scarlett's table, scratch his poor letter, enclose his postal notes, and drop it in a box at his elbow. The rest is done by Scarlett. Similarly, when a letter comes for him—where formerly a butcher or timekeeper might carry it about for a fortnight and then forget to give it to him, Scarlett's mailbag arrives regularly every day, and the letters are displayed on a huge letter-rack in the tent, and Bill can see in two minutes if there is one for him. Bill is not blessed with an overstock of the finer sensibilities, but his gratitude is very real. Henceforth he swears by the Ganger of the Y.M.C.A.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MAN OF RIGHTS

BUT not all who came to his net were genuine fish. One of the queerest and most exasperating men developed by the present labour unrest is the man with a distorted and magnified view of his 'rights.' There are so many, and so jealously does he watch them that it is scarcely possible to touch him at all without trespassing.

The one who interrupted Scarlett now in his lamp-cleaning was of that order. He was a city man, of course, and his face was a picture of outraged innocence, and in three minutes he had swamped Scarlett in a wordy torrent of eloquence, setting forth his rights and wrongs. He had left Melbourne at six o'clock that morning—left without breakfast, for the simple reason that there was none to be got. His wife and children were starving. Was that right? He had been sent up by the Labour Bureau to work at Kilcunda, and instead of taking him to Kilcunda the train had stopped here. His ticket entitled him to ride to Kilcunda, and he was set down here, six miles this side of Kilcunda. Was that right? It was a scandal, a shame, and it showed what they were.

Scarlett's heart was touched. He endeavoured to reason. The Bureau's ticket was good only on the regular line, he explained; with lines in

course of construction they had nothing to do, and after Nyora he was only carried by the grace of the engineers, and construction-trains were run to given points to carry material for the railway, not to suit passengers.

He might have saved his breath. The only point the man could see was that he was landed here, six miles away from his destination, and it wasn't right. Moreover—another iniquity—there was no train till six o'clock the following morning. He would have to wait here all day and all night before going on to his destination. Was that right?

Scarlett suggested that as it was only four miles across the hills to Kilcunda, one of the loveliest walks a man ever took, and he had all the afternoon before him (it was just noon), he might stroll along on foot. The man of rights stood aghast.

'Wot! Walk it, w'en they're supposed to carry me there? Not me!'

'But,' Scarlett persisted, 'it would really be much pleasanter walking along than sitting here and camping in the scrub to-night.'

But Mr. Rights turned a deaf ear. For one thing, he did not know the way, and would be certain to be lost in the bush, and 'wot then?'

Scarlett assured him that he had only to walk to the top of an adjacent hill and he would see the engineers' camp at Kilcunda lying before his eyes. It was not possible for him to lose himself.

The Man of Rights was in a difficulty, but not for long. 'That's all very well,' he returned presently in dogged tones, 'but wot right 'ave they got to turn a man out 'ere and compel 'im to walk w'en 'e 'as a right to ride to Kilcunda?'

Scarlett has already combated that point and

will not argue it again. He tries him on another. Did he not say his wife and children were starving?

'Yes, an' so they are, an' they call this a Christian country !'

'Well,' says John, 'you must think of your family first. If you stroll along to Kilcunda this afternoon, you'll be able to see the boss to-night and arrange to start first thing in the morning ; but if you wait here until morning, you'll be too late to see him. There's really no train at six—it doesn't leave here until eight—and the boss will be miles away by the time you get there. The consequence will be you'll not get a start to-morrow, you'll have to sit round there waiting all day, you'll lose your day's wages, and if your family is starving you've no right to do it.'

There is no escaping this logic, but the man with many rights is not easily cornered.

'That's orl right, mister,' he admits, 'but 'ow can a human being be expected to walk four miles an' carry a 'eavy swag, w'en 'e's 'ad nothin' to eat since last night, an' is weak an' sinkin' for want of proper food. Is that right ? '

Scarlett frankly admits the hardness of his case, and invites him in.

'I'll see that you get a good feed,' he says, 'if that's the only trouble.'

Under these circumstances the Man of Rights thought he'd tackle the journey, and Scarlett set about preparing the food. When all was ready he took it to him with a light heart, for who does not feel the better for having won an argument? But, alas ! his triumph was short-lived. The Man of Rights, given time to think, had found other reasons, and had determined not to go. He would insist upon getting his due and

make them carry him. Even if he had to camp in the scrub all night (which he did) he would have his rights.

'But what about the starving children and loss of pay?' Scarlett asked with indignation.

'That's the 'ardship of it,' the other replied; 'but it's a matter of principle, an' if I let them beat me now it will be 'arder to fight them next time.'

Scarlett gave him the food and then went off in despair. And well he might, for this was one of those of whom, alas! there are thousands, who will cheerfully ruin their prospects, wreck their homes, and bring untold misery upon their families rather than yield an inch for the sake of some trivial fancied right, distorted out of shape and nicknamed a 'principle.' Such men are the despair of civilisation.

As it happened, the first train was unusually late the following morning, and about ten o'clock, when Scarlett chanced to look out, his wrath was kindled to see the Man of Rights perched upon his swag on a truck, being shunted about the yard. He would lose his pay, his wife and little ones would suffer dire misery because the money he might easily have sent failed to come. But what did it matter? He had vindicated his principle! He was getting his rights!

CHAPTER XXIX

JOHN GOES OUT TO TEA

JOHN MACDONALD had selected his camp with judgment and an eye to beauty. The tents were pitched far up the hills on the gentlest of slopes, just enough to ensure that the water would get away in wet weather. Behind the camp there stood a thick clump of blackwoods, their beautiful dark foliage affording a fine background for the white of the tents. Of these there were five, pitched in a line, while another, arranged as a kitchen, stood at the rear of the big living tent, the centre of the group.

The ground before the tents formed a kind of terrace, and from it there was at all times an uninterrupted view of the wide valley of the Bass River, the river itself, and away to the left, Westernport, with its islands and gorgeous sunsets.

John Scarlett's heart was thumping his ribs like a trip-hammer as he marched up the little clearing to the camp. He was very much out of breath too, and it was not all due to hurry—though he had hurried; for owing to a number of men coming along at the last moment, he had been unable to leave so soon as he had hoped, and he was almost an hour late. But they were looking out for him, and as he came up to the camp Mrs.

MacDonald ran to meet him with outstretched hands.

'Here you are at last, Mr. Scarlett,' she cried in tones of relief. 'We had almost given you up.'

Scarlett, with many apologies, explained the circumstances which detained him.

'We just thought as much,' she said, when he had finished; 'but we would have been terribly disappointed if you had not come. Now you are here, though,' she added, 'we'll not waste time talking about it. We are glad to see you. Mr. MacDonald is not home, unfortunately—that will be a great disappointment to you. He can never be quite sure of his time, you know. But Sheila is here, almost as well as ever, and you'll just have to put up with two women.'

But Sheila was not there—that is, in the big living tent which they now entered.

'Strange,' the mother said, looking round; 'I left her here just a minute ago. Excuse me a moment, Mr. Scarlett; I'll just find out where she is and send her in, while I see about the tea.'

Had not the mother been so excited about his coming she could hardly have failed to notice Scarlett's deep emotion. When she left him, he found it necessary to steady himself by holding on to one of the tent poles. And little wonder! Was he not about to meet the girl who was all in all to him! To look again in the dear face and hear again the music of her voice! Would there be that look in her eyes he had seen when out on the rock? It is only sober truth to say that John was shaking from head to foot, while his mind was in a tumult. One thing only seemed clear, and that was that for such as he, with his poor physique, and looks, and fortune, to dream

of winning the love of a woman such as this was sheer madness—and yet—

‘John!’

He spun round as if shot with an arrow, and there, standing in the doorway, with the curtain partly drawn aside, stood Sheila herself. Her face was pale, her eyes preternaturally large, but they were full of tenderness, and on her lips was the shadow of her old smile.

The curtain fell behind her and she came unsteadily towards him with both hands outstretched, and Scarlett sprang to meet her.

‘I’ve been longing for you, John,’ she said, ‘more than all, but when I saw you coming over the clearing, I felt I could not meet you before mother, so I ran away.’

John’s only reply was to pat her shoulders caressingly, and draw her to him and kiss her, and they stood together heart to heart, and rejoiced as those that have ‘loved long since and lost a while.’

And after that first wild rush of emotion there came to both of them a great peace, with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, and when the mother returned, preceding the maid who came to set the tea, she found them standing quietly side by side in the front door of the tent, with Sheila pointing out the course of the river and the islands in the bay.

Quaint, discerning old Samuel Pepys (well named if, as some say, ‘Peeps’ be the right pronunciation of it) was tremendously interested, in his mild fashion, to notice that a man was far more eloquent when addressing his inferiors than at other times. There is no doubt as to the truth of this, but it is equally true that a man is at his best, not before his inferiors, nor yet before those

whom he knows to be superior, but when in the presence of his equals, provided only they believe in him and admire him sufficiently. So it came to pass that when John sat down to a kind of picnic tea with the two people who believed in him, and admired him, and loved him more than all else in the world beside (since his mother fell asleep) with his spirit afire with the rich, red, old wine of love, he could not but come out of his shell.

Never was a party met together so at one. Mrs. MacDonald's heart had gone out most strangely, even when all is considered, to this quiet young man. She had thought long and earnestly about him, and once, coming suddenly out of a reverie concerning him, had startled Sheila considerably by remarking—

'I could say of John Scarlett as Barrie's mother said of Gladstone, "I would like fine to be his mother."'

It was probably as well that Sheila's back was turned just then, for an odd, amused look came into her eyes and her face flushed crimson. But with such feelings towards him, it is small wonder the mother made him feel at home.

Sheila, too, whose bloom had suddenly returned, and with it the quiet sparkle to her eye and the smile to her lips, seemed wonderfully elated, and when grace was said, opened proceedings by saying—

'The weather is fine. We are all very well. Now, what shall we talk about?'

'What you please,' said John gaily, quoting Mr. Talkative in Bunyan's amazing allegory. 'I will talk of things heavenly or things earthly; things moral or things evangelical; things sacred or things profane; things past or things to come; things foreign or things at home; things more

essential or things circumstantial—provided that all be done to our profit.'

Mother and daughter looked at him with eyes and brows uplifted. 'Preserve us!' the mother cried, and 'Hear him, mother!' the daughter exclaimed. 'Who could have imagined Jo—Mr. Scarlett going on like that? But one can never fathom a man,' she added despairingly.

'Indeed!' the mother replied, taking John's part. 'I think it is just natural for Mr. Scarlett to talk in that way. One has just to look at him to know he could talk about anything, only he naturally wouldn't want to talk about them to two women.'

John waved his hand to signify that he renounced all claim to superiority; and it was as well he did, for Sheila was evidently not prepared to admit it.

'Indeed!' she cried in answer to her mother, 'I think Mr. Scarlett should feel very highly honoured by being allowed to speak in our presence at all.'

'Sheila!'

'I do.'

'You would look foolish if he rose up from this table and went off straight and left us.'

'Ah! But he won't; will you, Mr. Scarlett?' John signified that nothing was farther from his thoughts, and Sheila went on: 'He is going to tell us about his work down there at the camp, and about the men. I'm sure there must be some characters amongst them.'

So John began to talk of one and another—the Bishop, the four Paddys, the Man of Rights, and lastly of Mr. Albert Edward Chirnside. Never had he been so eloquent in his life or talked so freely, and mother and daughter listened and

laughed till their sides ached. Phemie, the maid, stood demurely by for a time, attending to this and that with a set face, but suddenly broke up, and with a screech of laughter fled out through the curtains, and went unreproved. And it was thus hilariously Mr. MacDonald found them all when he returned, and John had to go through it all again for his benefit, and when he would have skipped some detail, mother and daughter brought him back to it ; and so the story was told, and Mr. MacDonald laughed and smote his leg.

'I would like fine to have been there and seen that Chirnside,' he cried.

But John's time was now up and he must be stepping. So his hat was brought, and they stood outside to bid him goodbye. There were warm, lingering handshakes and cordial invitations to come back again and quickly, and John promised without reservation. Then he turned to Sheila, but she put her pretty hands behind her back and said, 'I'm going to see you off our domains. If I don't you may steal something.'

It was a very old and timeworn joke, but it served the purpose, and they set out together. And the father and mother stood in the door of the tent and watched them as they went.

'He's a fine man that, Alison.'

'He is, Colin,' the mother replied. 'Indeed, they're a fine pair.'

'What are you thinking of, mother?' he asked quickly.

'Oh, nothing at all,' she answered.

'Well,' he said musingly, 'I had a thought that way myself.'

As long as they were within sight of the tents Scarlett and Sheila walked apart, but when they were beneath the brow of the hill they drew

together. Presently their hands touched, then linked together, and when the bush had hidden them and their love in its cool recesses, they halted by mutual impulse beneath a great red gum, and with clasped hands stood looking into each other's eyes, and—' Oh, John ! ' Sheila whispered presently as she came to his arms. And—' Oh, Sheila ! ' he said fondly, and their lips met, and for a time that was all. But after a time he added : ' This happiness seems too great to be true ; I'm afraid each moment I'll wake up and find I've dreamt it all.'

For answer she wound her arms more closely around him.

' Sheila, dear,' he went on presently, ' it came to me this morning that I had been unmanly and had taken an unfair advantage of you out on that rock. The thought filled me with misery, for it was not only that it was unmanly, but I felt that you would despise me when you had time to think. I came up to-day to beg your pardon, if need be on my knees, and to ask you to put it out of your thoughts for ever, and now—'

' Beloved,' she said gently, pressing back his head and looking into his eyes, ' I expected that when you came to yourself you would begin to think that way. If you had not, I should have been disappointed in you. It is right you should feel like that, and yet, dear—I have thanked God on my knees that you did—forget a little—for otherwise we might never have known our love for one another, and then—' She paused a moment, as though that were a contingency too awful to contemplate, then resumed : ' But it was not unmanly, dear. You are very sensitive and shy, but you could not be unmanly. And don't think it was unfair, John, for indeed there was

little hope of escape, and if you had not spoken then—'

John in turn had to put back her head a little between his hands that he might look in her eyes.

'It is a great happiness, Sheila,' he said presently, 'that you see the wrong I did so clearly, and yet can speak as you do. I have loved you for your beauty, dear, and for something in you that I cannot name, but if you had neither beauty nor that other, I could love you for your—your mind, and your justice.' He paused a moment as this thought developed within him, then added, as if to himself, 'Surely God must be mistaking me for some other man to bless me with your love.'

Sheila placed her little hand on his mouth.

'No more of that, dear,' she said quickly. 'If God looked down from heaven to-night over all the children of men, he could not find another so brave and true and good.'

O woman ! Great is thy faith. Thou seest thy John to-night, not as men see, and not as thou shalt see him in many a poor day to come, when in the sad hours that happen to the best of men he shall fall below his level. But this thou hast in him, and it is much, come high or low, good fortune or bad : thy John will be ever sincere, and thus ever a gentleman, and what more could one hope for in a man ? So go thy way, lassie, thy faith is not misplaced, and thy faith shall save both John and thee.

But John is speaking now. And—

'Oh, Sheila ! ' he is saying, 'you don't know the kind of man I am ; but if anything under heaven could make me the man I would be, it is your faith and love. But tell me, dear,' he added, 'out on the rocks you only said you *could* love

me, and that has troubled me. Can you, do you *really* love me?'

She drew back from him with flashing eyes.

'Do you think,' she demanded, almost fiercely, 'that I would give myself to you like—like this, if my love had not gone before to—to sanctify the gift?'

Poor John is overwhelmed.

'Forgive me, dear,' he pleads; 'I was a fool not to see that. But I did so want to hear you say you loved me, that I lost sight of the—the other!'

And Sheila in her turn is melted.

'Poor John!' she says caressingly. 'I am so quick, and it was natural you should want to be sure. I should. So hear me, John.'

And with her hands upon his shoulders and her head a little back, she looked into his eyes and repeated Elizabeth Barrett Browning's burning words—

"I love thee to the depth and breadth, and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of Being and Ideal grace.
 I love thee to the level of everyday's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candle light.
 I love thee freely as men strive for right:
 I love thee purely as they turn from praise.
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life! And if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death."

There, John Scarlett, ganger, does that satisfy you?'

For answer, John Scarlett, ganger, could only

look dimly in the dear face through the mist in his eyes, and then strain her to his heart.

But their time has gone. John must hurry away now to his post, and Sheila must go back to the camp, or they will be fearing some harm has befallen her. Before they separate she has promised she will come down on Saturday night and sing at the social, and bring a basket of scones and cakes ; and with one fond kiss they part, he to go down the hill and she to turn again home.

And as John came out into the clearing below the belt of trees, and as Sheila stepped into the one above it, each paused involuntarily to look across the wide domain of earth and sky and sea. The sun—looking like nothing so much as a great luminous bubble, brilliantly and yet softly pink—declined to the horizon through a haze of smoke from the bush fires, that burn for ever in one place or another throughout the summer, and over the shimmering plain of the sea lay a narrow strip of light like a pathway of gold to the glorious gates of the west.

CHAPTER XXX

PAY-NIGHT

WHEN Andy Callander warned Scarlett that there would be a hot time in the camp pay-night, he knew whereof he spoke. At all events, the signs were ominous. After the raid the Shanty had been carried on by one of old Lanigan's spotters, a man known as Joe the Goose, just as though nothing had happened, and was an infinitely worse place than in the days of old Lanigan; while the 'Blue Pig,' that for some reason had been spared by the officers, perhaps with the view to another trip into the locality, had gone on as usual.

There had been a great falling off of business since the coming of the Social Hall, it is true, but both Big Marsh and the Spotter looked forward to pay-night to recoup them for the trade they had lost.

One of the difficulties in the way of stamping out this shanty business was said by the police to be the secrecy with which it was carried on, and this Scarlett had firmly believed; but as pay-day drew near his opinions underwent a change. Standing at the door of his tent one morning, he watched a cart approaching from the direction of Bass, and something about it having aroused his suspicions, he strolled across the line and stood aside as it came up. The cart halted in the middle

of the road before the Shanty, and the driver, with the help of the spotter and one or two others who were in some way associated with him, took three barrels from it and rolled them inside. Scarlett could scarcely believe his eyes. It was clear that whatever other difficulties there may have been in the way of the police, secrecy was not one of them.

In the afternoon of the same day he was standing in the door of the store, talking with O'Leary the manager, when the cart came along again. This time it halted at the 'Blue Pig,' where a couple of barrels were discharged after the same manner as at the Shanty. Hitherto Scarlett had entertained a great reverence for the police. He had been much impressed when, on their magnificent horses, they had come galloping like bush-rangers into the camp, looking fiercely round from their saddles for evidence of disorder; and he had been at a loss to account for the uproarious laughter with which these visits were received by the men. But now he knew, or at least could guess. Detectives they feared, but the police!—they were the standing joke of the camp.

The trouble with the Victorian policeman, and particularly the mounted policeman, is that the Government requires him to be a kind of general Pooh Bah, and when a special need arises, such as the building of a railway and the coming of thousands of men to his district, with the attendant shanties and vice, he is already so full of electoral census, and other outside duties, that, no matter how zealous he may be, he is unable to cope with the extraordinary demands made upon him.

This was the case in the huge Woolamai district. So it came to pass that the shanties laid in their stocks unhindered, and made ready for the harvest.

But if Big Marsh and the spotter made their preparations, Scarlett was not behindhand in making his. Early in the week he had asked the men to appoint a committee to draw up a programme for a concert and make arrangements for the social which was to follow. The committee took itself very seriously, and went to work with a will. A meeting was held immediately in Scarlett's sleeping-tent—Scarlett in the chair, or, to be as exact as the secretary's minutes, 'in the bunk'—from whence he laid down the rules. A programme was drawn up, and different ones were appointed to interview likely performers and canvass the boarding-houses and cockies (farmers) in the neighbourhood for gifts of provisions and the loan of cups or mugs.

Old Bill Hines, who had been a shearers' cook, undertook to make the coffee, while the secretary was instructed to draw up an announcement and display it conspicuously on the front of the store. This document, which Scarlett took down from its place the morning after the social and kept as a souvenir, lies before me now, of which the notice on the page opposite is a copy.

When the great night arrived, Scarlett was forced to admit that the shanties scored the first point. The men were all in camp by half-past five, and by half-past seven, when Scarlett returned from tea to open up, many were already half-seas over. Old Bill, however, was 'straight' (which was more than could have been said for him the previous pay-night), and already busy about the fire and the coffee. Such provisions as had already come were stored on the bunks in the living-tent, and Hallum the secretary was in charge, receiving others. The rest of the com-

NOTICE THIS NOTICE

SEVENTEEN MILE ORCHESTRAL & PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY

GREAT ANNUAL CONCERT AND BUN STRUGGLE,

Saturday Evening, 12th March,
Commencing at 8 o'clock.

The programme comprises many and varied items of an
Instrumental, Terpsichorical,
Vocal & Automatical Nature, and of
A Sentimental, Sensational,
Classical, Comical,
Philosophical and Statistical Character.

During the evening abundant refreshments will be served by
a corps of Skilled Waiters.

Doors open at 7.30 o'clock.

Carriages and Motors at 11.15

Ladies specially invited.

Old men in arms not admitted.

Front seats reserved for those who come first.

mitteemen, dressed in their best, were busy about the tent ; while Alf, a huge youth from somewhere in the Western District, stood by the door with a stick in his hand beating a terrific fantasia on a kerosene-tin and proclaiming to all, in a voice like that of a bullock with a sore throat, that the hour had fully come.

Half-past seven was the advertised time, and when it arrived the hall was packed ; for, in addition to the navvies, there came a crowd of farmers, together with their wives and grown-up sons and daughters, the latter blooming. Mr. Dingley was there in high good-humour with a sunflower in his coat ; and there, too, with her father on one side and old Paddy Barron on the other, a tremendously interested look upon her beautiful face, sat Sheila, while a multitude, unable to find room, stood round about the windows and the doors.

By a previous arrangement the chair was taken by old Bob Pearson, one of the 'gallopers out,' a man universally liked ; and punctual to the minute he mounted the platform. Bob was got up for the occasion. His face shone with soap and hard rubbing, while his hair was nearly combed off his head.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said, when the tremendous cheers that greeted him had died down a little, 'we're glad to see you all. We've got a good programme, and we hope you'll enjoy it ; an' if there's anybody 'ere'—fixing his eye on old Paddy, who, having paid a visit to the Shanty, was showing a tendency to interrupt—'that can't behave themselves in the presence of ladies, I 'ope that they'll—they'll—darn well try, anyhow, so as not to bring this camp into disgrace.'

This sentiment was applauded with great

fervour, and by none more than old Paddy himself.

'An' if they don't,' he roared, when the applause had subsided, 'be gobs, Oi'm the bye that'll make them!'

Bob fixed him sternly with his eye.

'Now, Paddy,' he said severely, 'we don't want none of that, and we won't have it! An' now I'm goin' to call on Mr. Scarlett to open the performance by givin' us a chune on the phonograph.'

There was more applause then, during which Scarlett released the lever and the machine broke forth into Sousa's 'Yale March,' and with that the performance began strenuously and in earnest.

Scarlett had scarcely finished his contribution when old Bob was up to announce that Mr. Billy Sandes would sing 'All that glitters is not gold'; and the stalwart Billy 'tore into it,' to use a camp expression, with all the might of his lusty lungs, and emerged from the ordeal triumphantly. He was encored, of course, as was everybody else, 'just to show,' as one of the boys put it, that there was 'no animosity'; and, returning, he sang the song right through again.

Dick Whittington was then invited forward to favour the company with 'If those lips could only speak.' Dick's voice was almost too much for him, so deep a bass was it, but by not opening his mouth very wide he managed to keep it under control. Had it been trained and brought into complete subjection he would have made a star. The crowd joined in the chorus. When Dick had rendered his encore, a red-headed son of Erin, rather unsteady on his feet—who had made repeated journeys up the aisle to the front in order to sing the song he believed himself entitled to sing, and

had been as often seized and brought back by the committee—got beyond their control, and, mounting the platform despite the efforts of the chairman, announced his determination to 'favour' the audience, and old Bob, thinking that, if allowed to do so, he might quieten down, graciously gave permission. But then another difficulty arose. Redhead could not remember what it was he wanted to sing. Like Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it had gone from him.

'W'y doan'—you—'nounce the n-name of my song?' he demanded imperatively of old Bob.

'Ow can I w'en I don't know wot it is?' old Bob replied, in pretty much the same tone as the magicians, astrologers, and Chaldeans must have used in reply to the unreasonable monarch already quoted, when he preferred to them a similar request.

'Well, w-w-wot sort of a chairman are you?' he asked, with bitter scorn. From old Bob he turned to the Bishop. 'W'y—doan' you play it over?' he asked sharply.

'If you'll tell me what it is, I will,' the Bishop replied mildly.

'You—you meanter say you donno wot it is either?'

'No. How should I?'

'Well, strike me pink!' the other exclaimed, regarding him with disgust. 'Wot the'—something or other—'good are you? What good are any of you,' he added, looking round upon them all, 'when you don't know music when you hear it, and don't know one chune from another?'

With a few eloquent touches, he then outlined the character of the Bishop, and was proceeding to fill in the details with a lurid brush when old Bob gripped him and proceeded to put him out.

But it was no easy matter. Redhead was strong and active, despite the drink he had taken, and in the rough and tumble contrived to land a blow on the bridge of old Bob's nose that not only took the skin off the outside, but set the blood flowing from within.

Excitement by this time was running high, and anything might have happened, for there were plenty present who loved nothing so much as a fight, and Redhead had many sympathisers, when the tall form of Andy Callander pushed to the front.

Andy and Scarlett, who to-night was everywhere, had been standing together near the back when the disturbance arose. Scarlett was loath to interfere, and stood it as long as possible, hoping for a peaceable solution ; but when it came to blows he turned to the big Irishman beside him—

‘ You'd better take a hand, Andy,’ he said. And there was no need to say more.

Just how it was done no one could say, but in less time than it takes to write it down the drunk was shot out into the night and returned no more.

It seemed hard to Scarlett then that after all this turmoil Sheila must needs be called upon to sing. He trembled for her, but probably there was little need. The Bishop shook off his non-chalance, and straightened up visibly as she handed him her music. Yes, he could play it. What could he not play when he chose? Then she turned to the men, and an exclamation of wonder broke from many when the soft light of the lamp fell upon her face.

Hitherto Sheila had been unknown to the camp. Only once before had she been in it, that being the occasion of her visit to John in quest of literature ; and on that day the men were all

away at their work and had not seen her. And now, when she stood before them in her radiant beauty, with an expression of friendliness and good-fellowship upon her face that told them she was not a superior person, but felt perfectly at home with them, there was not a man who would not have died for her upon the spot. Old Bob, letting his nose take care of itself for the moment, led off in an encouraging clap, which proved the signal for a demonstration, and it was some time before Sheila could proceed.

When she did, it was to evoke a greater triumph. Amongst many qualities possessed by this young lady, not the least was a rare gift of discernment, and learning from John that the men were mostly Irish, she had chosen her opening song accordingly. Singing without a book, leaning the least bit forward, and searching their faces with her eyes, she began—

'What will you do, love, when I am going,
With white sails flowing, the seas beyond?
What will you do, love, when waves divide us,
And friends may chide us for being fond?

The waves divide us, and friends may chide us,
O heart of mine. I'll still be true,
And I'll pray for you on the stormy ocean,
With deep devotion—that's what I'll do.

What would you do, love, if home returning
With hopes high burning and wealth for you,
If my barque that bounded o'er foreign foam
Should sink near home, what would you do?

So you were spared, I'd bless the morrow,
With want and sorrow that left me you.
I'd welcome you from the wasting billow
My heart thy pillow, that's what I'd do.'

It may be that my love for Sheila is such that to write impartially about her is beyond my power. Nevertheless, it is true that from the moment when her glorious voice fell upon their ears the men listened spellbound. And although probably it went deepest into the hearts of the Irish, those of every nationality present were caught by the spell and held captive. There was but one heart among them all, and it was hers. She had to sing again, of course ; otherwise the place had been pulled down. Her second song was 'Doon the Burn,' and then it was the turn of the Scotch, and as many as were there expanded visibly with pride and gratification. They would have had her sing again, but she was not to be persuaded.

To John it seemed that both songs were chosen specially for him, and that Sheila, with all the passion of her life, was singing them into his heart, and his feelings were in a tumult. But that was precisely how everybody felt, and the effect was indescribable.

It was well, then, that old Bob was able to announce a hornpipe to follow, for any singing must have been flat by comparison. The dancer, a runaway sailor from one of the ships of the American fleet, mounted the huge box which Alf of the voice and kerosene-tin had brought in at the last moment, 'so that we can see the bloke's feet.' This box, by the way, involved Scarlett in considerable difficulty later, for it proved to be the storekeeper's bread-box, which Alf had in some way contrived to filch for the occasion. However, it served the present purpose well, and with Jimmy Keen fiddling and the Bishop improvising on the organ, the sailor managed to knock out a very creditable hornpipe.

Next on the programme came Tommy Corrigan,

one of the greatest comedians off the variety stage. His name was anything but 'Corrigan,' but what, nobody knew ; and he got no other. He sang a classic melody, 'We're getting it by degrees,' as only he could sing, and by way of encore gave 'Johnny Brannigan.'

The next performer was a newcomer. He was a small, spare, clean-shaven man, probably twenty-five years old. He was not of the navvy stamp, though he was dressed in the typical navvy costume, and excited no great hopes when he stood up. The one striking feature about him was the raw redness of his neck, owing to recent exposure to the sun. He had no music, but the Bishop undertook to keep time, and he stood forth. He, too, was an American, possibly another break-away from the fleet, and old Bob announced him as Mr. Lovelock, but the name he bore as long as he remained in the camp was 'The Yank.'

'Ever of thee I'm fondly dreaming' was his song, and the first notes caused the Bishop to turn in his seat to take another look at the singer, and sent a hush all round the place. He was a clear tenor without a flaw, and he sang as though singing his heart out to some girl he had left away in far New England. In other circumstances the singing would have provoked a demonstration, but here it had a poor reception. Nor is it greatly to be wondered at. It was too good for a navvy, and in a flash the same thought occurred to many. Men turned to one another with a look of suspicion, and the whisper went round at once that he was a 'D.' ; and from that hour every man who wished the shanties well eyed the Yank as King Saul is said to have eyed David, when he fancied he had designs upon his kingdom.

After the Yank came Willie James, one of the greatest drunks in the camp, who, to Scarlett's unqualified amazement, recited a blood-curdling story about the evil effects of drink.

This done, Andy Callander, with a voice of astonishing range and power, and to a tune of his own composing, sang an old-time favourite, 'After the Ball'; and Paddy Roberts brought the concert to an end with his inevitable 'Kitty Wells,' everybody joining in the chorus. The programme was finished, but old Bob had a word to say before they brought in the supper.

'I've been asked by the men of this camp,' he said, 'to submit the following resolution to this meeting:—

"That the best thanks of this meeting be accorded to the Young Men's Christian Association for their work amongst the men at the Woolamai Camp, and for the use of the building and conveniences."

And I might say,' he went on, 'that we feel so pleased, that we've taken up a bit of a collection amongst ourselves, and we want to hand it over now and ask Mr. Scarlett to send it along to headquarters with the resolution we've just carried.' And coming over to Scarlett, Bob handed him the sum of £5 10s.

Scarlett was tremendously surprised, as no whisper of what was being done came to him. However, he accepted it on behalf of the Association with a good grace.

'I told you when I first came,' he said 'that we were not on "the make," and we'd no intention of asking any man for money, but seeing you've

been good enough to collect this, I accept it gladly; and I've no doubt when I send it along to headquarters, with the resolution you have passed, it will encourage them to keep on. On behalf of the Association, I thank you from my heart. There's one other thing before I ask Mr. Bill Hines to send the supper in,' he added : ' To-morrow night we're to have a service in this building. It's a religious service, but not denominational. I don't want any man to come to-morrow simply because he has made use of the hall through the week, but I'll be pleased to see you all the same ; and I think you'll be glad to know that Miss MacDonald has kindly agreed to come down and help us in the Service of Song.' (Great applause.) ' Now, boys—the coffee.'

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BUN STRUGGLE

THE boys needed no urging, least of all those on the committee. They were anxious for the success of the supper in any case, but the presence of Sheila and the farmers' rosy daughters put them on their mettle, and Scarlett had scarcely made the announcement before the flap at the back entrance was lashed up to the lintel, and the 'corps of skilled waiters,' who proved to be a body of stalwart navvies, appeared with loaded trays, and plunged into the crowd.

Sheila, somewhat to her amusement, presently found herself a centre of interest. Old Paddy Barron had lost his hat and was turning the place upside down in his endeavours to find it. From an outsider's standpoint it was no great loss, being old and misshapen and greasy beyond description, but from Paddy's point of view it was a calamity. Had it not been his constant companion for years? Had he not slept in it—lived in it almost? It would have been easier far to persuade him to part with his pipe, which is saying a great deal. So he made frantic efforts to discover it, and soon had everybody about him, Sheila included, engaged in the search, but it was of no avail. The hat was lost as completely as though a whirlwind had caught it from his head and carried it off to sea.

' Some of them divils of byes been hevin' a lar-r-k,' old Paddy exclaimed at length as he gave up the search ; ' but mebbe they'll fetch it back whin they've had their fun out uv ut.'

Meanwhile the 'skilled waiters' had been streaming in and out, and buns, scones, cakes, and coffee were disappearing at a rapid rate. The phonograph was enlivening proceedings with an occasional march or song. The younger and bolder of the navvies had long since got on conversational terms with farmers' daughters—'tarts,' as they were pleased to call them—and now seized the opportunity given by the supper to 'line up' beside them, where they joked and laughed uproariously.

The committee was happy, for things had gone without a hitch—the barking of the chairman's nose being a thing of no consequence. The navvies were happy to a man ; for the scones and butter, cakes and fruit that came from the farms were a treat they did not often get, and, besides, they had enjoyed the concert, and their pay was still in their pockets.

The farming people were happy, for the concert was a break in the monotony of the farm life such as they did not often have, and they were making the most of it. Mr. Dingley was happy, for it was very much to his mind, and he beamed more like a benevolent Father Christmas than ever, and laughed with tremendous good-humour.

Sheila was happy, for she could not but see that her John was a very popular man, and she was proud of her lover. John was happy for two reasons. In the first place, Sheila was most blessedly near, and where she was, was heaven. In the second, he was satisfied that so far as the great majority of the men were concerned he had beaten the

shanties out of sight, for after an enormous supper, and whole pints of coffee, few even amongst the hard drinkers would be likely to go to the shanties to finish up.

Probably the only man not happy was old Bill Hines, the shearers' cook, who had charge of the coffee. Bill was a connoisseur, and had laid himself out to make the coffee a special treat.

'I'll give you such a pannikin of corfee, Ganger,' he said to Scarlett early in the evening, 'as you never tasted in all your born days!' And as the event proved he was right.

But the coffee was not up to his expectations, the taste was not right, and although nobody noticed it particularly—for the coffee at socials of all descriptions, even Church socials, is notoriously vile—yet Bill was bitterly disappointed.

'I can't make it out,' he said for the twentieth time, taking a sip with his head cocked on one side and his forehead puckered into a frown of disapproval. 'It ain't like wot I generally make at all. Wotter you think of it, George?' he asked anxiously of the fiftieth latest comer to join the group standing round about the fire.

'Wal,' George returned, smacking his lips critically after a long pull at his pannikin, 'I rather like it. I'm not a hog for corfee, as a rule, it's too darned bitter an'-dishwaterish; but wot I like about this corfee is,' he continued judicially, 'that there's a bit of "body" in it, an' it goes to the spot.'

George's opinion was greeted with approval. The term 'body' struck the popular fancy, and every man present drained his pannikin and held it out for more.

'You're too pertickler, Bill,' one of the others remarked, wiping his mouth with the back of his

hand, 'or else you've got a bad taste in your mouth.'

And in the face of so much testimony, Bill was almost inclined to agree. So for the time being it was left at that.

But at length every vestige of the supper was eaten. 'Auld Lang Syne' was sung, the Bishop played the National Anthem, and hats and wraps were adjusted by the girls.

Father Christmas shook hands with everybody within reach, radiating cheerfulness everywhere. He had no fear of Big Marsh & Co. to-night, for he was going home with a company of neighbours. The 'corps of skilled waiters,' who were busily washing up, rearranging the seats, and bringing back the tables, were doing all with a will, and great good-humour prevailed.

Nor was it at all disturbed when two policemen dismounted in the crowd at the door. Policemen were not popular in the camp, not even with Scarlett, who had come to realise how utterly futile their efforts were. But whatever his defects may have been, John was ever kindness itself, and because the policemen were doing their best, and had ridden many miles to be there, and would ride many more before they got to bed, he invited them to have a cup of coffee, and after ransacking his tucker-box, discovered enough cake and biscuits to give them a solid supper. The policemen gladly accepted and fell to.

It was at this stage that the terrible discovery was made. The policemen having drunk one cup of coffee, were prevailed upon to have another, and Scarlett sent Hallum to get it.

'Getting near the bottom, Bill?' Hallum remarked, as he held the pannikin out to be filled.

'There's a fair drop left in 'er yet,' Bill replied, rasping the dipper on the bottom of the copper to make sure, and then—'Hello! Wot the dooce is this?' he cried in perplexity as the dipper came up laden with some foreign thing other than coffee. 'One of the dishclothes tumbled in,' he muttered. 'No, I'm hanged if it is!' he added on closer inspection. 'Stir up the fire, Sam, till we have a look! That's it! Oh, Chrissmus! Well, I'm d——d!'

He held the object up to the light between his fingers, and a roar of laughter broke from the bystanders. It was Paddy Barron's old hat!

For about thirty seconds Bill was so wonderstruck that he could do nothing but turn the hat over and over and look at it.

'Must have been one of Big Marsh's crowd put it in w'en I wasn't lookin',' he remarked at length. 'No wonder I couldn't get the taste right. Wot was it you said, George, about the corfee 'avin' a lot of "body" in it?'

George's reputation as a connoisseur was in imminent danger of ruin. But he rose to the occasion.

'Strike me pink!' he exclaimed, 'wasn't I right? There *was* a lot of body in it—old Paddy's body. I guess he's sweated about a ton of himself into that hat. It's a kind of Paddy soup. No wonder we enjoyed it!'

But upon a common impulse every man retired into the shadows, and for a time there was nothing but retching and scraping of throats.

'Well, anyway,' Bill remarked with a weak voice when they had returned, 'that settles the policemen's supper. There'll be no more corfee for them.'

'Ow's that?' Hallum asked at once.

'W'y, they wouldn't drink stewed Paddy, would they?' Bill asked innocently.

'Not if they knowed it,' Hallum replied, 'but who's to tell them it's stewed Paddy? You gimme a couple of pannikins of it, Bill, an' then you come an' watch them Johns scoffin' it orf an' smackin' their lips.'

Bill did as he was bid, and the crowd followed Hallum as he returned; but not feeling sure of themselves in the light, they stood back in the shadow of the hall, where they annoyed the constables considerably by bursting out into thunderous laughter every time the pannikins were raised to their lips. But there being no law against laughter, and nothing else visible of an incriminating nature, the police were fain to cut their supper short, and with rather a curt good-night, they mounted their horses and rode away.

As for the navvies, they formed a procession and marched across to old Paddy's tent, and to his unspeakable joy restored to him his much-lamented hat.

Scarlett's bit of heaven came when all was over. Sheila and her father had remained behind the others, and when everything had been satisfactorily arranged and the hall put in order for the morrow, Scarlett strolled up the track with them, 'to walk off the excitement of the concert,' he said, but in reality to exchange one form of excitement for another more congenial, for Sheila walked between, and presently their hands stole together, and hand in hand they walked beside the unsuspecting father.

Mr. MacDonald was evidently much impressed.

'Man, Scarlett,' he said presently, 'this is a great work you're doing. You've got those fellows by the wool.'

At the top of a slope they paused and looked back upon the camp. The shanties were easily distinguishable, for not only were they very much larger than the other tents, but far more brilliantly lighted. However, Scarlett pointed out with satisfaction that all round the camp the tents of the men were lit up, their lights twinkling like far-off stars on the surface of the sea—a sure indication that the great majority had gone from the social centre to their bunks instead of to the shanties.

'Thank God !' Scarlett ejaculated fervently, as this evidence of success became clear, 'we've beaten the shanties to-night, and saved a few pounds for their wives.'

It was a famous victory.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE STORY OF ACHAN

SCARLETT had but little fear as to the attendance at the Sunday night service, for he felt assured that, however the men might regard a religious service, they would turn up in force to hear Sheila sing. And he was right. Long before seven-thirty, the hour appointed to begin the meeting, the tent was packed, and many, unable to get in, stood outside. It was not only the men of the camp who came—the farmers were there in force again, while quite a contingent, with Mr. Dingley at their head, came down from the little church in the hills.

After prayer, the first half of the meeting was devoted to singing, the hymns for the most part being those used by Mr. Charles Alexander in his 'Song Services.' Sheila, with great power and feeling, sang a number of these, such as 'Tell mother I'll be there,' 'Where is my wandering boy to-night?' and 'O mother, when I think of thee.' The 'Wandering Boy' proved the favourite. Scarlett suggested they might like to learn it and join in the chorus. The suggestion was received with acclamation, and soon the camp was ringing with the refrain—

'O where is my boy to-night?
O where is my boy to-night?
My heart o'erflows, for I love him, he knows,
O where is my boy to-night?'

Turn where you will, if you get beneath the surface of a man's life, you find him thinking tenderly of his old home and his mother, and through a mist of tears there came floating up before the mind of many a rough man that night visions of the home of his boyhood and the face of the best friend he ever knew—his mother.

Judged by certain laws, Alexander's hymns, and many like them, I suppose, are not hymns at all ; but judged by the impression they made upon the hearts and minds of the men, they are hymns of the highest character, and by their means that night many a man who had for years been beyond the reach of a religious influence was melted and softened. Old-time vows and promises long forgotten were renewed, and not a few lives stirred and touched to finer issues.

After the singing Scarlett set out to give a running commentary on the story of Achan. He had never attempted to preach before, and although in the rough, bracing atmosphere of the camp he was fast finding himself, and becoming strong and self-reliant, the only explanation of this address is to be found in the words 'The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.' What follows is a kind of sermon, which the fastidious reader is hereby warned to skip. Nevertheless, it may be said, it is not the usual kind of sermon, and should you read a paragraph or two, the chances are you will read to the end.

'When the children of Israel crossed the river into Canaan,' he began, 'the first city of any consequence to which they came was the city of Jericho. The people of Jericho had been watching their movements for a considerable time, and when that extraordinary host had crossed the river, they went inside, banged their gates, and pre-

pared for a siege. And then began the strangest siege that has ever been from the beginning of time until now.

' Day by day a great procession went the round of that city, and day by day the people on the walls stood up to watch it going by, and wondered what it meant. Day by day that extraordinary procession was continued until the people of Jericho grew used to it and began to regard it as a pantomime, but on the seventh day the pantomime came to an end. On that day, when they had fairly girdled the city with their march, the line suddenly halted, the trumpets pealed, and at that blast the great walls of Jericho came tumbling down in dreadful wreck and ruin. Every man of Joshua's army went up straight before him with his sword in his hand, and when night came not a soul of all that city was left alive, with the exception of one family.

' One of Joshua's soldiers fought his way gallantly into the city. Possibly there was in the army no braver man than Achan, and when the battle was over Achan went strolling round to see what he could see. Achan had never been in a city before, and all was new and strange to him. Have you ever noticed the people from the backblocks when they come to town at show-time? You see a man standing in the street staring up at the top of some tall building, and wondering how ever they contrived to get the bricks up. "My word," he says, "what a high house!" And with Achan in Jericho it was pretty much the same.

' But after a while Achan's curiosity carried him farther. "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do," and Achan, having nothing to do, went inside a house to see what it was like there.

Now, Achan had never been in a house before. All his life he had lived in a tent, and houses were strange to him. Inside it was all very wonderful, and presently he found something that astonished him and pleased him very much indeed.

'Hanging on the wall right before his eyes was a garment of wonderful texture, all the way from Babylon. Babylon was at that time beginning to be a kind of Manchester, sending its goods all throughout the world, and one of these Babylonish garments, with its beautifully woven texture, hung there in the house.

'It was one of the amazing things of the sojourn in the desert that these people did not wear their clothes out, "their raiment waxed not old upon them." The clothes Achan wore to-day he had worn for years, and very ordinary and commonplace they appeared beside this. He had never seen anything like it. It charmed him—fascinated him.

'By and by I see him trying it on to see how he looked in it, and he said to himself—

"I wonder what the wife would say if I came home in a thing like this?" Then he took it off, hung it up again, and stood looking at it.

"It's a bad business to look very long at some things ; it gives the devil an opportunity. It did now, and presently he came to Achan, and said, "Take it, Achan."

"Oh, no," Achan said, "I couldn't do that!"

"Why not?"

"Well, the Lord has forbidden us to touch anything!"

"Quite so! Quite so! And if it were silver or gold or anything of value, you couldn't think of it, but this is such a *little* thing."

"How many people go wrong through little

things ! You try them with some tremendous thing and it will have no effect whatever. The temptation is nothing. But try them with a little thing and see the difference. Here is a fellow in a bank, and he goes to the races, perhaps, and goes farther than he meant to go—loses more money than he possesses—and next day hundreds of sovereigns are flying through his fingers. The tempter says—

‘“Here’s your opportunity. Borrow two or three until to-morrow.”

‘And the boy flinches. “No,” he says, “I can’t do that !”

‘“Why not ?”

‘“Well, it’s too much like thieving.”

‘“Nonsense ! If you were really taking it, it would be different, but you are only borrowing it until to-morrow. The horse is bound to get home to-morrow. Take it, lad, take it.”

‘Still he hesitates. He does not like the idea. The tempter says :

‘“If it were a thousand pounds it would be a different matter, but just a sovereign ! Such a *little* thing ! Take it, lad, take it !”

‘And the poor fool does so, because it’s a little thing, and the next thing he knows he’s in the dock, and that’s not a little thing.

‘There was once a boy at the top of an orchard on the side of a hill. His father was working half-way down the orchard and called him, and the boy came running down the hill, as boys will, and he shot by his father and went right down to the palings at the foot. By and by, when he came up again, his father said—

‘“Why did you go down there? I told you to come here !”

‘And the boy said: “Yes, but I began to

run and couldn't stop myself till I got to the bottom."

'And there are lots of people like that. They begin going downhill in a little way, and the devil gets them on the run, and they can't pull up again till they come to the bitter end. Oh, these little things ! Oh, these Babylonish garments ! There isn't a man in this camp to-night, reeling and cursing his way to hell, who did not begin to be what he is along the line of these little things.

'Achan was convinced. He said : "It's such a little thing," and he wrapped the garment up in the smallest possible compass and put it under his cloak, so that no one could tell he was carrying anything, and went on.

'Achan should have gone home then, but he didn't. He went strolling round again. And, after all, I question if he could have gone, for sin is a kind of endless chain, and one sin will always lead to another. Now, see how this man was led from one sin to another.

'He had not gone far before he saw another house, a more extraordinary house than the first. So he must go inside and see what it is like there, and inside he goes, and presently he comes across something like the Ark of the Covenant, a kind of box or chest. Achan lifts the lid and looks in. An amazing sight greets his eyes—silver, no end of silver—money, no end of money ; and Achan was a Jew, and a Jew, like a Scotchman, has a right appreciation of the value of money. Achan looked at it, and while he did his conscience said—

"Shut the lid, and get away as quickly as possible."

'But the tempter said : "Count it, and see how much there is."

' Achan began to count, and he ran the money through his fingers, and there is a wonderful feeling about money—wonderful !

' Ten, twenty, forty, fifty, one hundred, by and by two hundred, shekels of silver, waiting for the first man who came along to take it. The tempter said—

' " You are that man, Achan. Take it."

' Achan shrank back.

' " No, I cannot do that."

' " Why not ? "

' " That would be thieving."

' " Well, what of that ? "

' " What of that ! Why, if I took it I would be a thief ! "

' " What is that under your cloak, Achan ? "

' " But you said—"

' " Oh, yes ! I said— But that doesn't alter the fact that you stole it. You're a thief, Achan—thief ! thief ! thief ! And you might just as well take this as the other. Take the money ! "

' The meanness of the devil is marvellous. See that little child. Her mother puts a clean pinafore on her, and says—

' " Now, run out and play, but if I catch you in a mud-puddle, look out ! "

' The child goes outside, and the devil takes her to the first water, and says—

' " Now, in you go, and have a good time."

' " But mother says I'm not to."

' " That's all right, but this won't hurt you."

' " But it would dirty my pinny, and mother would be angry."

' " Ah ! but this is clean mud, and you needn't go far—just a little way."

' And directly the child has a speck of dirt

on her clothes the devil drags her up standing, and says—

“Now look at yourself. What *will* your mother say? You might as well go right in now, for you’re bound to get a thrashing”—and in she goes.

‘And a man will stand here and say: “Shall I go to the Shanty or shall I not?”

‘And the devil says: “Certainly. Go by all means, but not to drink, of course.”

‘Well, you go; and you’re no sooner there than the devil says: “How about a drink?”

‘“No; I’m afraid if I began I might go too far.”

‘“That’s all nonsense. Have just one.”

‘“If I have one, I may go too far.”

‘“Not you. Besides, now you’re here, you’ll get the credit of having one whether you do or not!”

‘Well, you have one, and it’s no sooner down than the devil says—

‘“That’s you—guzzling again. You *can’t* keep away from it. Go on, tear it into you, and get it over.”

‘“Here’s a young fellow in the way of temptation. Conscience says: “By all you hold dear, keep away!”

‘The devil says: “You go. There isn’t a bit of harm. It’s just nature. All men do it. This is your opportunity. You go!”

‘The boy argues, but the devil persuades him, and he goes, and the deed is no sooner done than the devil says—

‘“Now, look what you’ve done. Your life is ruined. How can you ever look a pure woman in the face again? This is your level; now keep to it!”

‘ And down he goes to the gutter. Oh, me ! It’s a bad business arguing points with the devil. You always fall in. The only way is to turn and run for your life.

“ ‘ There’s no harm, Achan. Take it, man, take it ! ’ ” And now : “ You’re a thief, Achan ! Thief ! thief ! ”

‘ Poor Achan ! Still he hesitates, and the devil tries him on another tack.

“ ‘ You’re a married man, Achan,’ ” he says, “ and if you have no thought for yourself, what about your wife and children ? You are going into a new country. It is all very well for Joshua to say he will give every man land up there. How does Joshua know ? And even if you get the land, and it’s good land, you must have money to work it. Here is the money. It’s just providential. Take it, Achan ! ’ ”

‘ How often the devil gets at men in this way ! A man will cheat and lie and oppress his fellow-men and his employees, and justify himself in the face of God and man by saying that it is for his family. A man must provide for his family. And another man will lie and cheat and rob his employer, and justify himself by saying, “ It is for my family I am doing it ; not for my own sake, but for my family.” ’ ”

‘ Oh, men ! you can’t help your family that way. No man ever did his family a greater wrong than to soil and blacken his own good name. I had rather my father left me a beggar and a stainless name than millions of money, if he had to stain his hands to make it.

“ ‘ Well,’ ” Achan said, “ I wouldn’t touch this for myself, but a man must consider his family.” ’ ”

‘ So he gathers up his two hundred shekels of silver, rolls them up in the Babylonish garment

in as small a bundle as possible, puts the bundle beneath his cloak, and goes strolling on again. And Achan has not gone another fifty yards before he finds a great wedge of gold—a kind of gold coin worth hundreds of pounds—a little fortune to Achan.

‘ Just notice the sequence of this thing. He began with a Babylonish garment, fairly valuable, but nothing very much. Then he gets to silver and then to gold. He began with a small thing, and then got to a big thing and then to a huge thing. See how subtle temptation is ! If the devil had brought Achan face to face with the gold first of all, Achan would have turned his back on it and gone away without a second thought. But he brought him to the Babylonish garment first and then to the silver and then to the gold. The little thing first, and by sure degrees to the big thing.

‘ And I tell you, no man is ever an outrageous sinner to begin with. No man is an out-and-out drunkard to begin with. In nine cases out of ten it begins like this. There is a boy on the street amongst friends older than himself who ask him to come and have a drink. He doesn’t want to drink and doesn’t want to go, but they keep talking to him.

‘ “ Come on ! Come on ! ” they say, “ there’s no need to drink hard stuff. Take lemonade—a cigar—anything you like—only come ! ”

‘ By and by they persuade him. They get him into the bar-parlour. They can’t get him into the bar. Oh no ! The bar-parlour is bad enough, and he drinks something soft and it nearly chokes him. He goes in last of all, and looks round before he goes in for fear a policeman or some one else may see him and tell ; and he rushes

out at the first opportunity and swears he'll never go into such a place again.

' But you watch for a while. By and by you will see him leading the whole crowd in to shout for them. He's first in and last out, and the strongest stuff in the place is not too strong, and when he goes out he doesn't care now if God or his mother sees him. The devil begins by breaking down your principles in little things, then he gradually leads you up to the big things, and the rest is easy.

' The worst man in this camp to-night will tell you he came to be what he is to-day by breaking a little way through the principles he had been taught in his youth. Shun the little things and you will never have cause to repent the big things, for the devil destroys all his victims by degrees.

' Well, that was Achan's trouble. He went wrong in a little thing, and now he's up against a big thing. Here was the wedge of gold. But there was no need to argue with Achan to take that. He might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb now, he tells himself, and he took the wedge of gold and put it with the silver and the Babylonish garment beneath his cloak, and struck out for his home.

' And Achan's wife and family had an anxious time that day while they waited their father's return. Was it possible he had been killed in battle? They guessed and feared. When other men came tramping back they besieged them with questions. Had they seen anything of him? Had anybody seen Achan?

' At last there is a great shout of joy. Here he is at last, striding across the plain, and wife and children go flying out to meet him. But what can be wrong with father? They have never known

him like this. He has the face of a corpse and eyes that fall and shift all over the place, and he isn't glad to see them. What can the matter be? Is it possible he has been wounded in the battle? That's it! They fly to him, full of tenderness, but he puts them away roughly. There is no wound. He waves them all back and goes striding towards the door. Ah me! When sin gets hold of a man it makes a mighty difference in him.

' You see a man on pay-day coming back from work. See the children looking out. See them fly to meet him when he turns the corner, and see the wife going to the gate in haste to welcome him. But what's the matter? Why do the children shrink back and fly for their lives in the other direction? Why does the wife shrink inside with her white, sad face? What's wrong with father? Sin—sin! Father has been drinking, and his sin has transformed him into a beast.

' And sin has transformed Achan, and his loved ones stand back and wonder what has come over father. They come to the door of the tent, but there's no admission. Achan makes sure of that, and he sets to work on the floor of the tent, and digs and digs and digs, until there is a great hole, and then down goes the gold and silver and the Babylonish garment, and he stamps the earth again on the top and spreads a skin over it.

" " It is all there safe," he says, " and nobody saw me."

" " But stop a minute, Achan; you were watched."

" " What? "

" " You were seen."

" " Seen! God forbid! Who saw me? Joshua? "

“ ‘ No—God saw you, Achan ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Oh yes, of course,’ he says, and he is greatly relieved. “ ‘ Why, you gave me quite a turn. Of course, God saw me ; God sees everything. But so long as nobody else saw me—’ ” That’s the way a man will talk.

‘ Here’s a young fellow goes out and commits the worst sin of his life—the unpardonable sin, in a sense—and next morning he meets his pure mother and sisters at breakfast and not so much as a blush upon his face.

“ ‘ It’s all right,’ he says to himself ; “ nobody saw me.” ”

“ ‘ But you were watched.’ ”

“ ‘ What? ’ ”

“ ‘ I say you were watched.’ ”

“ ‘ God forbid ! Who saw me ? Father ? Mother ? ’ ”

“ ‘ God saw you.’ ”

“ ‘ Oh ! ’ ” and he’s greatly relieved, “ is that all ? Of course, God sees everything, but then—” ”

‘ But let me say this : It were better a thousand times that all the camp had seen if only God had missed him. It were better a thousand times that your mother, your betrothed, your best beloved had watched your every move that night than that God saw you. In the end it is God alone to whom we give account.

‘ And now Achan flings wide the tent. They may come in now and welcome father home.

‘ But he is not the same father. It never is the same father when once he has gone down before a temptation of that kind. And it is never the same boy or girl when they have once flung down the walls of the heart and done the devil’s will. Never again.

‘ By and by they go to bed and the children

go to sleep, but there is no sleep for Achan or his wife. Achan thinks she is asleep, and when all is quiet he sits up and listens for her breathing. He is sure she is asleep, and he rises stealthily and goes to his hoard. But how can a woman sleep when her husband is selling himself to the devil? And she watches him burying his plunder deeper and deeper, deeper and deeper, trying to cover up his sin.

' Man, it's a desperate business trying to cover up sin. It's the one thing you can never do. If you buried it beneath the foundations of hell, sooner or later it would come out. You can't dig deep enough to bury sin. No place but the grave of Christ is deep enough to cover it.

' Well, the morning comes, and with it the sequel ! There is terrible trouble in the camp—the armies of God flying before the enemy, and Joshua is praying to God to know the meaning of it all. In answer to his prayer the Lord says—

' " There is sin in the camp, Joshua, and I am not going to lead the people forward if they give themselves to sin. You must find it out and stamp it out before I lead you farther."

' So Joshua sets out to locate the sin. But what a task ! One secret sinner among a million people ! But Joshua must try, and he takes his stand on rising ground and orders the different tribes to march by the point where he is. God will whisper in his ear when the sinner comes, the trumpet will sound, the tribe must halt at the sound of the trumpet, and the end will be worked out. And that great march-past began.

' There has been many a great march-past in days gone by, but never such another as that. Never ! More than a million people were to march by a given point.

' Here they come. All the tribes under their own standards. The tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of Zebulun, and the rest of the tribes all marching by the given point ; and as they come to that point each one wonders, " Can the sinner be in our tribe ? " The tribe of Benjamin goes by, but the trumpet is silent. There is no sinner there, and the men of Benjamin are dismissed and go away with a sigh of relief. Tribe after tribe goes by. The sinner must escape ! It is not possible to detect him !

' By and by comes the tribe of Judah, and a proud tribe it is ! Are not they the royal tribe, and is not the Messiah to come from their tribe ? And the men of Judah have no fear, and they say, " There is no sinner in our tribe," and as they do the trumpet peals and the tribe halts. The traitor is here. All the other tribes are dismissed.

' But the tribe of Judah must go by now in their clans, and here they come, clan after clan, each one hundreds strong, and they begin their march by that point. Now comes a princely clan, the Zarhites. There is no traitor here ! But, alas ! the trumpet peals, and the clan halts. All others may go now, but this clan must march by in its different families, and they begin again. Family after family goes by and thank God when they get by, for who can tell where the sin may prove to be ?

' Now comes the family of Carmi, all good men and true. But, hark ! the trumpet peals and the family of Carmi is taken. All others may go, but this family must pass singly, man by man. The end is drawing near. Man after man goes by. Now comes a tall warrior marching firmly, but it is the firmness of despair. The trumpet

peals its note of doom. The traitor stands revealed !

' You see, after all, God was the one to be reckoned with. Achan couldn't hide his sin from God. He buried it down and down, but it was no use. And you may hide your sin from man, but you cannot hide your sin from God. You may bury your sin in the bottomless pit, or in the loneliest spot on the loneliest star that wanders lost in the space beyond, but you can't hide the sin from God. That's the impossible thing. Sooner or later the sin will out.

' Well, discipline must be maintained amongst the people. When a general takes a city in our day, and he gives orders that any man found looting will be shot, if a man is caught looting, they shoot him without compunction. There is nothing so demoralising to an army as thieving and looting. It is stamped out mercilessly. If that is done now, what were they likely to do then? They determined to blot this thing out in so terrible a way that the people would never dream of doing anything like it again.

' So they took Achan out to a valley, and behind Achan marched his wife, whom he loved better than life, and behind them came his children with all he had and held dear. And his wife never questioned him, never reproached him. She could go out and die with him, but she wouldn't reproach him now. And behind Achan comes his eldest son. He is on the threshold of life, and has been looking forward to the splendours and wonders of the new land that lay before them—and in his heart he cursed the father who had cut him off in his youth.

' And here by his side is his daughter, just on the threshold of womanhood, and there in the

crowd is the man to whom she is betrothed ; but her bridal day will never come, for she must go out and die for her father's sin. And the little children follow on with their big, questioning eyes uplifted, innocently wondering what it is all about, and they all go out to die a terrible death because of their father's sin.

' Was there ever in all the world a sadder procession than that? I don't think so. Not even when Jesus went out bearing His cross to Calvary. And there is no sadder sight under God's heaven to-day than to see a father or mother taking their little children by the hands and leading them down to destruction.

' Oh, man, isn't it time you called a halt and asked whither your ungodly example is leading your little children? If you go down, you will drag your children down, and hell will be ten times hell if you waken there to find you have dragged there those you love best in the world and wish most of all to see in heaven.

' Well, they put them all down in the valley—the miserable man, the dear wife and little children he had led to their doom, and the people stood above and rolled stones down upon them. And that was the end.

' Well, Achan sinned for the sake of his children, sinned to enrich them and do them good, but he learned that day that the wages of sin is not sunshine and prosperity and peace. The wages of sin is death, and the man who sins must collect his wages to the uttermost farthing. God help us to learn by his experience ! '

When Scarlett had finished they bowed their heads, while he prayed that God would help every man, for the sake of his loved ones, to be strong in the hour of his trial. Then after they had

sung the hymn, 'Yield not to temptation,' they went out into the night.

The meeting was over, but not the work. That had just begun.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SNAG

THAT was the only name they knew him by, and it was thoroughly descriptive, as most navvy nick-names are. Had he taken ordinary care of himself, he would have been a fine-looking man. He was well and strongly built, had a good complexion, and eyes of such clear Irish blue as are rarely to be seen. He must have been very beautiful as a child, and Scarlett often caught himself picturing his childhood and the pride of his mother when friends and neighbours remarked his beauty and prophesied his great career.

But, alas ! how different it all had turned out ! It is well that mothers cannot see ahead. If they could, possibly many a wee babe would be strangled in its cradle. In many cases it had been better so.

But who the Snag was, where he came from, or his antecedents in any direction whatever, no man knew. He lived in a tent with a dog, a poor forlorn wretch that he kicked and thrashed continually. Its howlings and yelpings at such times filled Scarlett with righteous indignation. The Snag did no work, but was in some way associated with the shanties, probably as 'a spotter.' Most of his time was spent about them, and it was his privilege to drink up the dregs of the mugs

that other men had done with. Probably there were plenty of men in the camp who could have killed him, if they had chosen, in a stand-up fight ; but his tongue was so utterly vile, and his powers of abuse so awful, that nobody cared to cross him.

The Social Hall the Snag regarded as a pestilence. He it was who had raged up and down the road cursing it and all its works the day after the finding of the beer. He did not come to the social. He rarely came to the tent, and Scarlett was not altogether sorry ; for he was so cross-grained that sooner or later everybody fell foul of him, and Scarlett had no wish to be the target of his abuse.

However, the afternoon before the social he suddenly appeared in the doorway. He was very drunk, but not so morose as usual. Scarlett had just made some tea, and asked him to have some. The Snag consented, and they fell to.

' I'm goin' to give—thish shpotter business up,' he said presently. ' I'm goin' to—open a shop.'

' What kind of shop ? ' Scarlett ventured.

' What kin—a-shop ? '

' Yes ? What kind of shop ? '

' A fruit shop—fruit an'—confectionery an'—an' engagement rings.'

' Oh ! '

' I—I sposesh you think—I'm a—scoundrel to be goin' about—like thish ? ' the Snag remarked presently.

' I think you're very foolish,' Scarlett replied mildly.

' I sposesh you—t-think—I go on the—razzle—becos I like it ? ' the other went on, looking at Scarlett accusingly.

' I don't know,' the latter answered.

' W-w-well, let me tell you—I doan'—like it

attall. I'm on a—bender to-day, not because I like it, but because I—gotter be on one."

Scarlett looked incredulous, and the other noticed it, and became dictatorial.

'Lis'n to me,' he said, waving his arm. 'Lis'n to me. Do y'know wot day thish is?'

Scarlett waited to be informed.

'It's the anniversary of—my mother's death,' he said solemnly, 'an' I'm keepin' it up.'

Scarlett turned white and sick, and felt fit to knock the wretch down with an axe that stood conveniently near. But unheeding, the Snag went on—

'It's the anni-versary of my mother's death—an' I keep it up this way becos if I didn't—I'd be cryin' all day. I'd rather keep it up this way—than cry all day,' he continued. 'If my mother 'ad lived I wouldn't 'ave been 'ere.'

But Scarlett had had too much. To him it was so much blasphemy, worse by far than anything he had ever heard in, say, the roadway, and he rose up in disgust and left him.

The Snag did not come to the social. He finished his anniversary between the shanties, and had a royal time, for pay-night was his harvest. But the following day the camp was full of Sheila's singing. Those who had heard her could talk of little else, even when playing 'two up,' and all were looking forward eagerly to hearing her again at the service in the evening. The Snag heard the talk in the 'Blue Pig' and elsewhere, and became interested. The services he despised as heartily as he detested the Social Hall, but a beautiful singer was another thing.

'If there's a woman goin' to sing,' he said at length, 'the Snag must be there,' and there he was accordingly.

And so it came to pass that night that one of those miracles which are the despair of science, so called, but the triumph and glory of the Cross, was wrought in the Snag's life. How it happened no man can tell to this day—for as thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, even so thou knowest not the works of God, who maketh all. The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth, 'so,' said the Saviour, 'is every one that is born of the Spirit of God.' Somehow, some time during the service, God breathed the breath of life into the Snag's poor spirit, and he became a living soul.

When the service was over he went away quietly. The way to his tent lay by the 'Blue Pig,' and, impelled by some inward power, he turned aside, lifted the flap of canvas that hung at the door, and went in. Big Marsh was there and several others; a number of pannikin-glasses stood upon a table, and at sight of him Marsh leaned across and began to drain the dregs of all the pannikins into one. But something strange and altered about the man gave him pause, and made him look at him intently, as did the others.

'What the —'s come over you?' he asked.

'You needn't drain those pannikins out for me, Marsh,' the Snag replied. 'God has spoken to my soul to-night, and I'm never goin' to drink that stuff again.' Then he turned and went out of the tent.

Marsh and his friends looked in each other's faces with amazement.

'What the . . . *can* have come over him?' Marsh said again, as he looked in astonishment at the others.

From the 'Blue Pig' the Snag walked across to the Shanty, and the spotter, anticipating his desires directly he made his appearance, began to gather up what mugs and pannikins stood about, preparatory to pouring them into one. But the Snag, standing just within the threshold, stopped him.

' You'll never need to do that any more for me,' he said. ' God has spoken to my soul to-night, an' I'm never goin' to drink that stuff again.'

Then he went out into the night, and the spotter turned in wonderment to the others.

' Strike me pink ! ' he exclaimed. ' Wot can 'ave 'appened to the Snag ? '

Farther along the way one of the tents, the flap of which was tied back, and from which a light streamed out, stood by the way. The men within were opening up a bottle of beer, and as the Snag passed by they hailed him.

' Come in and have a drop of decent stuff for once in your life,' one cried generously.

The Snag halted in the doorway. ' No, thanks, Jim,' he said in tones so different to his usual that the men stared at him. ' God has spoken to my soul to-night, and I'll never drink that stuff again.'

He disappeared from the door, and the men turned to look at each other.

' E's got 'em again ! ' one of them remarked, helping himself to the bottle.

' Meanin' the blue devils ? ' another queried.

' Yes,' the first replied, ' an' a nice time we'll 'ave of it w'en 'e begins to sing out. Let's foller 'im and see wot 'e'll do.'

As the Snag approached his tent, the dog, which was tied to a stake at the door, barked, and then whined dismally as it recognised its master. Enter-

ing the tent, he struck a light, and lit a bit of candle stuck in the neck of a bottle. Then he turned to the dog.

'Come here, boy,' he said gently.

The poor brute, trembling and whining with fear, grovelled on its belly towards him, expecting to be kicked across the place, but instead the man took its two forepaws in his hands and looked into its faithful eyes, while the tears streamed from his own.

'Poor old Grip,' he said brokenly—'poor old Grip! I was supposed to be the higher animal, but you were the higher animal all the time. You never left me. You came to me, and licked my face, and warmed me with your poor body, and watched over me when every man's hand was against me. You gave me nothing but love, and in return I starved you and kicked you and beat you. But never again, old Grip,' he went on, looking earnestly into the good, kind eyes. 'Never again—the terrible past is gone for ever. God has spoken to my soul to-night, and in the future I'll try to make it up.'

The dog, gathering confidence, licked his face, and the man, taking the fine old head between his hands, rested his cheek upon it. When he released him the dog leaped upon him, and seemed like to go frantic with joy. The men who had come to see stole away.

'It looks as though the Snag's took a tumble orl-right,' the one who had offered the beer remarked. 'An' it'll be a darn good thing if he has, for 'e's been the curse of this camp long enough.'

So the man and the dog lay down together that night, the dog almost as much transformed as the man, and the man was transformed indeed! A

great peace such as he had never known possessed him, and he slept like a child. For unto him his Bethlehem and Christmas-time had come. Unto him a son was born ; unto him a child was given, and judgment was upon his shoulder ; and his name was called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

But it was only after many days that Scarlett came to know these things ; for, rising up a great while before day, the Snag struck his tent and rolled up his swag, and by the time the camp was stirring was far away, old Grip going on before, barking joyously and frightening the rabbits out of their wits.

It would perhaps have been better had the Snag remained in the camp to witness to God's power to save men to the uttermost, but his one dominating idea just then was to get right away from the old life and its horror, and so he set out.

CHAPTER XXXIV

' C U M G R A N O S A L I S '

AFTER the first week or two the men settled down to the new state of affairs as though they had been used to it all their days. But Scarlett soon realised that to keep up the interest he would have to provide a good deal of variety, and by strenuous thinking and planning he contrived to do so. Every week there was something new.

Mr. Chirnside left a donation of five shillings, and Scarlett expended it on a gorgeous silk neckerchief for a prize in a draught tournament. So many players entered that the games lasted for a week. Then came a travelling jeweller, who donated a fine gun-metal watch for the champion quoit-player. The result was another week's strenuous excitement. The phonograph was a never-failing source of entertainment, and there was talent enough in the camp to provide an impromptu concert at any time. Lectures, too, were given continually. The General, amongst others, came down and held forth on his adventures in the long African war; while a concert and social, or bun struggle, as the men called it, became the recognised thing for pay-nights.

But Scarlett liked best the quiet, ordinary nights. The summer was gliding imperceptibly into autumn and the nights becoming crisp and

sharp, and as the change became more perceptible, the brightness and warmth of the hall proved an irresistible attraction. Soon after tea the men would drop in in twos and threes. There would be a great demand for newspapers and letters, then a comparison of notes of the day's happenings by men of different gangs ; then some, particularly amongst the younger men, would fall to quoit-playing, others to draughts or dominoes. Always a number would write letters, while others, again, would read or look through the magazines.

But by far the most interesting group was that which assembled night by night and sat together to smoke and tell yarns. Scarlett, as often as he could manage it, joined this group, and was always rewarded. One night is typical of many. There were together Ted Warden, Bill Hines, the shearers' cook ; Paddy Barron, Bland Holt, Garfield, Andy Callander, Paddy Roberts, Paddy Ryan, old Bob, Billy Sandes, and a number of others.

'Did you ever come across a chap called 'Ankerchief Jones, Ted?' old Bill was asking as Scarlett joined them,

'Did I wot? I reckon everybody that ever worked in New South Wales knows 'Ankerchief !'

'Well, if they don't they oughter. Did you ever 'ear about the time that 'Ankerchief an'—'

But here Scarlett broke in.

'Handkerchief Jones !' he exclaimed. 'That's a queer name—who is he ?'

'Ave you never 'eard of 'Ankerchief Jones, Mr. Scarlett?'

'Never.'

'Well, you surprise me ! 'Ankerchief is a New South Wales navvy, an' the best man with a shovel from the Grafton to the Murray. To see 'im shift

a 'eap of mullick is a marvel ; it would make your mouth water ! '

' My word ! ' Warden chimed in with admiration. ' I mind the time w'en 'e 'ad a match on with—'

But Scarlett, fearful of losing the main object of his inquiries, intervened again.

' But Handkerchief ? ' he repeated. ' How did he ever come to be called by that name ? '

' Oh,' Ted answered readily, ' it was simple enough. 'Ankerchief was always very loud in 'ees dress—loud as a brass band. 'Ees boots 'ad plush sides in them—blue on one side an' red on the other—an' the photo of 'ees girl done on a medallion let in on the toecaps. 'E wears a watch-guard as big as a bullock-chain right across 'ees chest, with a medal or somethink hangin' on to every link. 'E wears as many decorations as a tram conductor. 'Ees fingers are covered with rings—Brummies most of 'em, though—an' 'e always wears a very gay silk 'ankerchief round 'ees neck, an' that's 'ow 'e come to be called 'Ankerchief Jones.'

' Larst time I see him,' George broke in ' 'e 'ad on a clean shave.'

' Go on ! ' Ted replied. ' Larst time I see 'im 'e 'ad a goatee beard ; but I ain't surprised that 'e took it orf, becos the chaps was always annoyin' 'im by arskin' for a swing on it. 'Ankerchief used to knock about a lot with Mick O'Byrne once,' he added. ' Anybody seen Mick lately ? '

' No,' old Paddy broke in, ' an' won't nayther.'

' Why, Paddy ? '

' Becos Mick has passed in his checks.'

' No fear ! '

' He has so. Wasn't Oi wid him whin it happened ! We were droivin' out of Junee wan noight

after we'd been havin' a bit of a busht up, an' Mick sez to me, "Paddy," he sez, "we'll do somethin' to-night goin' home that'll make us remimber this thrip." "All roight ye are, Mick," I sez. So he took the whip an' wan of the reins an' Oi took the other rein, an' away we wint. It was great goin'—till we collided wid a telegraph-pole. I lit on me head on a tussock, an' was niver a bit the worse, but poor Mick had his neck broke.

"Well, thin I wint up and tould his father and mother, an' there was terrible ongoin's. "It was just loike Mick," his mother said, "to go an' break his neck suddenly loike that. He niver had no consideration for the feelin's uv his family." Thin they began to talk about who was to break the news to Mrs. Mick, because it was bound to be a shock to her. So at last ould Mick said he'd go down and break it gintly so as not to upset her; an' down he wint on horseback, whistlin' "The wind that shakes the barley," so as she'd niver dhrame what he was afther.

"Well, whin Mrs. Mick heard him comin', she come out wid the baby in her arrums, an' the ould man looked at her wid a shmoile so as she wouldn't think anything was wrong, and thin he said—

"Good-day, Widdy O'Byrne."

"Don't you be pullin' my leg, father," she sez. "It'll be toime enough to call me Widdy O'Byrne whin I am Widdy O'Byrne."

"Ah, thin," he said, "it's toime now; for Mick broke his neck roidin' home wid Paddy Barron a couple of hours ago, an' you are Widdy O'Byrne sure enough."

Everybody appeared to enjoy this little classic except Bland.

"Whoi don't you tell thim the finish uv ut?" he said at length.

'Wasn't that the finish?' Paddy returned uneasily. 'Mick's neck was broke.'

'Yes, but what about the funeral?'

'What about ut?'

'Ah, well, thin, Oi'll tell them mesilf. It's gospel truth!' Bland assured them as he surveyed the group. 'Oi wint over to the funeral because me an' ould Mick had come out in the same ship, an' me an' Paddy here was walkin' along two and two behoind the hearse, an' Paddy here was exshplainin' how it all happened, an' he wasn't very choice in his language.

"Whist there, Paddy!" ould Mick says to him. "His riverence 'll hear ye." An' so he would, the dear man, for he was walkin' along not half a chain ahead at the front of the procession. But Paddy here forgot himsilf entoirely.

"The devil take his riverence!" he says. "What do Oi care about him?"

'Well, thin, sure enough somebody tould his riverence about ut, an' next Sunday mornin' he called Paddy up forinst the congregation.

"Paddy Barron," he sez severely, "it's been reported to me that on the way to Mick O'Byrne's funeral you shpoke disrespectfully of me, an' said, 'The devil take his riverence!' Now, before the whole church, I want to know whether you said that or whether you didn't say it."

Bland paused there and looked at Paddy doubtfully. Paddy returned the look, and then both men laughed. The others waited expectantly. Then, as Bland seemed indisposed to go farther, Ted inquired—

'What happened then?'

'You moight as well finish it,' old Paddy growled. 'Oi'll hev wan up agin you directly.'

'Well,' Bland resumed, 'Paddy screwed his hat

up in his hands and looked all round the roof, and thin he said, "I wouldn't loike to shwear, your riverence, that Oi said that—just exactly, but it's very loike a thing Oi would say."

Old Paddy could scarcely wait till the laughter had subsided before he struck in—

'Hould on! Hould on, now! Did ye know Bland wint down to Milbourne to see the sports last Sint Patrick's Day? No? Well, thin, he did, an' Oi wint wid him to take care of him. We wint down two days beforehand so as to hev a bit of a look round. An' round an' round we wint lookin' at things, but the thing that shtruck Bland's fancy most was that ivery man in the strates seemed to be wearin' socks, an' it not Sunday nayther; an' whin he pointed it out, Oi noticed it mesilf.'

"Shure it must be a new fashion that's come in," he sez. So we folleyed the men round an' round to make certain, an' iverywhere we wint ut was the same. We shtood by the Post Office and watched them goin' up the shteps, an' niver a wan but had socks. We shtood at the corners and watched them boardin' the cars, an' ivery mother's son uv them wore socks. We wint up to Parlia-mint House an' watched them climbin' up there, an' it was all the same. Niver a wan but wore socks.

"Ah, well, thin," Oi sez, "what do ye think uv ut, Bland?"

"We moight as well be dead," he sez, "as out of the fashion, so we'd better go an' get some socks too."

"All roight ye are," Oi sez, an' away we wint. After a whoile we found a place that the Post Office is next to, an' we wint in there. No sooner were we insoide than a fresh-lookin' ould gentle-

man, wid a short billygoat beard an' a flogger coat comes up.

““What is ut, gintlemen?” he sez, quoite friendly.

““Socks, sir,” sez Bland, touchin’ his hat an’ givin’ a shcrape wid his fut.

““This way, thin,” the ould gentleman sez, as polite as you loike, leadin’ us up to a counther.

““Forward, Winkle!” he yells; an’ Winkle, who was another heavy shwell, tears out uv the back somewhere an’ bends over the counther.

““What can Oi do for ye?” sez Winkle.

““Let’s hev some socks,” sez Bland.

““What koind of socks?” sez Winkle.

““Whoi, the koind ye put ye’re fate in,” sez Bland.

““Yis,” he sez, ““Oi know that; nobody wears socks for a necktie. But is ut *hot* socks ye’re wantin’?”

““Hot or cold,” sez Bland, ““it’s all the same to us; but if ye’ve any that’s hot in the winter and could in the summer, that’s the koind we’d be wantin’.”

““Ah, well, thin,” Wilkins sez, ““Oi see it’s hot socks ye want. How would these suit you?” he sez, untyin’ a string and flingin’ down about twinty pair wid all the colours of the rainbow—green an’ red an’ pink an’ blue an’ black an’ yaller. ““Noinepence,” he sez. Then he flings down another bundle. ““Eighteinpince,” he sez. Thin he shcatters another lot on top uv thim. ““Two bob,” he sez. Thin, before you could wink, he had another dose down on top uv that lot. A shmart young man was Winkle. ““Two an’ six,” he sez, an’ was reachin’ for another lot whin Bland shtopped him.

““Hould on, Winkle,” sez Bland, in a voice as

could as an ice-cream man's. "Hould on," he sez. "It's evident ye're labourin' under a misapprehension. We're wantin' socks for two min wid the usual number of fate, Winkle," he sez, "not for a colony of centipades ! ''

'Talkin' about socks and santypesedes,' Andy Callander exclaimed when he had recovered his breath, 'reminds me of old Bill's whale ! '

'Wot wale was that?' Ted asked with curiosity.

'Bill's whale,' Andy replied. 'He was tellin' me about it this mornin', while he was shovellin' muck.'

'I didn't know Bill 'ad a wale!' Ted exclaimed, with a somewhat sceptical glance at that gentleman.

'Neither I 'ave,' old Bill replied defiantly; 'but I darn near 'ad one.'

'Ow did you manage it, Bill? Fishin'?'

'Fishin' be blowed!' Bill replied scornfully. 'A lot you know about wales! No,' he went on, striking another match. 'It wos wen I wos drivin' bullocks down at Curdie's River. One Sunday mornin' early I was goin' for a stroll along the beach, just where the river runs into the sea, an' when I got by the sandhill I got a terrible shock. There was a great black mass lyin' at the water's edge, an' I thought there was a ship ashore.'

"'Ere's another bloomin' shipwreck," I sez to meself. But it wasn't—it wos just a wale! I see that as soon as I come up to 'im. 'Ees tail wos on the sand, an' 'ees 'ead out in the breakers, just risin' an' fallin' with the lift an' fall of the water. An' wen I 'ad a look at 'im I made up my mind 'e'd passed in 'ees checks, an' wos washed up by the tide.

'Well, I seen wot to do at once. I knowed

that wot with the meat an' fat an' skin, a wale wos worth a little fortune. So I cleared back to the farm as 'ard as I could lay me legs to the ground an' yoked up the bullocks. They didn't like it much, because it wos Sunday ; but I lammed into them for all I wos worth, an' talked to them like a gran'father, an' 'ad 'em down there on the beach in no time. I'd been draggin' logs to the sawmill at Timboon, so my outfit wos just wot wos wanted.

'First thing I did, I got a big log-chain round the narrer part of the wale's tail an' fastened it with a hook. The chain wos thirty feet long, an' it just hooked together, so you can imagine the size of 'im. Then when I'd got it fixed I hooked the bullocks on to that an' stood 'em up, an' wen I did it wos a sight worth seein'. I 'ad eighteen of a team, all good ones ; an' I tell you, boys, wen they all moved together somethink 'ad to shift—an' they shifted that wale. The first tug they got 'im up the beach about six foot, an' I reckoned I wos a made man. But it don't do to sing out too soon, I found out then, for that wale wäs no more dead than wot I wos. 'E wos just 'avin' a snooze, an' no sooner did them bullocks dig their toes into the sand an' tighten the chain than 'e woke up, an' then you never seen such a corroboree in all your born days. Talk about rear and buck ! 'E just stood up on 'ees tail an' then flopped down like ten thousand bricks. Talk about splash and row ! It wos somethink awful !

'They say a wale is a kind of a sea cow, an' I believe it ; an' this one wos aperiently just a big old sea bull. An' wen 'e found I wos on to 'im, 'e bellered worse'n forty land bulls all put together. But that didn't 'elp 'im, for the row 'e kicked up frightened the life out of the bullocks,

an' they pulled harder than ever to git away from 'im.

' Just across the river, on the high ground, there's a sort of village where the people come for summer, 'an just then it was chock full of visitors. It wos too early for them to be about, but the row we kicked up roused 'em all out of bed, an' they come runnin' out like bees, wrapped up in sheets an' pillercases an' blankets an' pyjammers, an' all sorts of things, thinkin' it was a steamer on the rocks. An' they stood up there on the cliffs watchin' the contest. An' it must 'a been a good one to watch, too. We wos pretty near equal, an' sometimes me an' the bullocks gained a bit, an' sometimes the wale did. An' 'e was bellerin' out an' thrashin' the sea, an' I wos bellerin' out an' thrashin' the bullocks ; an' wot with the shoutin' an' yellin' an' splashin' an' roarin', you couldn't 'ear yourself speak ! We wos doin' well. I believe at one time thebettin' among the visitors wos forty to one on me an' the bullocks, an' we would 'ave won 'ands down, only just wen we wos gettin' our work in, an' the wale wos about to chuck up the sponge, I broke me whip 'andle over the near poler's ribs, an' that settled it. The bullocks give up pullin' then, an' the wale got them on the run down the beach, an' the next thing you knew 'e 'ad them all in the water. ; an' then 'e laid 'ees ears back an' headed out to sea, an' went off like an express train. I stood on the shore an' watched 'em as far as I could see, an' then I went back to the farm for a drink of milk ; an' that wos the larst I ever did see of the wale or the bullocks either.'

' But I thought you said they turned up later on in Tasmania ! ' Andy exclaimed.

' Yes, but I didn't see 'em,' old Bill replied.

'I only 'eard about it from some one who wos over there. Aperiently the wale went off 'ees 'ed with fright, an' tore away orf an' never stopped till 'e bashed into the rocks of Tasmania, a hundred an' fifty mile away, an' settled 'imself. An' wen the bullicks come ashore, wot with the water they'd swallered an' the distance they'd been dragged, they wos 'ardly able to stand up. Then, wen nobody claimed 'em, they were yarded up in the pound at Devonport an' sold for the benefit of the Tasmanian Government.'

Amid the laughter which followed, Scarlett rose up.

'Well, Bill,' he said, 'I award you the belt for to-night.'

CHAPTER XXXV

EXIT THE ' BLUE PIG '

SCARLETT'S star was in the ascendant, of that there could be no question, and every day some practical kindness or convenience helped to seat him and his work more firmly in the saddle. A stronger, more competent man might have presumed as this became manifest, but Scarlett's bitter contempt for himself would never allow him to go far in that direction. He took nothing as his due, nor ever in his most expansive moments dreamed of patronising the men. To the last, when a way-faring man, though a fool, deigned to step inside and avail himself of the hospitality provided, Scarlett felt flattered. If the deadest of dead-beats spoke words of praise of the institution, Scarlett treasured them up as a miser his money, and if anything went wrong, the biggest tough in the camp was as free of his medicine-chest as any of the others.

He had, too, a right appreciation of the value of the countenance and patronage of the chief officials, but he never went out of his way to seek it, nor made distinctions between them and the men. Thus, when the chief engineer came to look round the hall, and, after expressing his approval of what he saw, presented Scarlett with the wherewithal to purchase a flag to float over it, he received no

more and no less attention than the last dead-broke ; and when the line was sufficiently advanced, and the Commissioner's train came through on a tour of inspection, and Sir Thomas, who, from his American experience, knew the value of such institutions as the Social Centre, and desiring to encourage the man in charge, stood out graciously on the platform of his car, waving his hand, Scarlett waved in return, but his wave did not vary a hair's-breadth from the one bestowed upon the driver of a construction train that had run through half an hour previously.

Then, too, notwithstanding his temperament, he was not demonstrative, though morbid, excitable, spasmodic—intense rather than strong—yet he began unconsciously to develop a characteristic which Carlyle allows to be the mark of the strong. In a degree he possessed the 'talent of silence.' Though easily frightened he never cried out. If he took convulsion fits, he was able to hold himself ; and if he created smoke he was able to consume it, and so far was proving to be a right man, and or ever he was aware the men swore by him from one end of the section to the other.

Nor was it long before the effect of his work began to be felt in the shanties, though it was felt rather than seen. So far as Scarlett could tell, they were as prosperous as ever. Drinking went on continually, though, he was inclined to believe, in diminished quantities—had he been told how greatly diminished, he would have scarcely credited it. As a matter of fact, the shanties were having an anxious time, the 'Blue Pig' especially.

Big Marsh was not doing a third of his former business, and, a morose, ill-tempered wretch at the best of times, he now became positively savage in his bearing towards those about him. To make

matters worse, he had lately begun drinking heavily, and after about a week of this debauchery seemed more like a lunatic than a sane man, and his wife and children were going in fear of their lives.

This, then, was the state of affairs when the 17th of March came round. Scarlett, in view of the fact that about two-thirds of the men were of Irish extraction, had organised an Irish concert. Nothing was to be sung but Irish songs, and no recitations given save Irish. The men entered heartily into the spirit of the thing, and the concert, proved a hilarious success. Sheila came down at their special request to sing, 'Oh ! what would you do ?' and having sung it, must needs sing half a dozen others, including the 'Irish Emigrant' and the ever popular 'Killarney.'

Scarlett himself was in great fettle, chiefly owing to the fact that Sheila's father was not with her. He had a very real regard for that gentleman, but he was not sorry he had stayed away, because it meant that he would have the privilege of seeing Sheila home and would have her all to himself on the way. The prospect so filled him with recklessness that he actually sang 'McCarthy's Mare,' and brought the house down.

The mine manager pleaded busy, and unquestionably he was busy ; but it was clear to both father and mother how things were going, and they were not ill-pleased. So Mr. MacDonald remained home with his work, and John needs must be Sheila's escort, and a blessed time this, their first long walk alone together, proved to be.

On the way back to the camp after seeing Sheila safely to her home, Scarlett had to pass by the 'Blue Pig,' and as he drew near he noticed that a light was burning in the back part of the place, where Big Marsh lived with his family. Presently

he was brought up standing by screams of terror in a woman's voice, followed by an agonising appeal for mercy. This was broken by Big Marsh's bull-like tones, shouting, 'I will! I will! So help me . . . !'

Scarlett's blood ran cold as he listened, and the woman's voice broke out afresh, pleading in agony—

'No, no, for the love of Heaven, no !'

'I will, I tell you. I'm goin' to smash your . . . head in ! I'll kill the kids, too, every one of 'em, an' set fire to the place, an' shoot meself, an' have done with it. Come on !' he shouted savagely, 'come on !'

There were sounds as of a struggle, and Scarlett stood in the track hesitating and half-terrified. He knew the folly of interfering between men and their wives, but it almost seemed as though murder was about to be done. What should he do? While he hesitated the couple in the tent came between him and the light, and their figures were plainly outlined on the canvas. The man had the woman by the throat and was forcing her backwards. This was too much. John's hesitation broke from him as it had been cotton, and rushing across to the place, he peered in through a rent in the side, fearfully as Tam O'Shanter when looking in the window of the haunted kirk. It was a strange sight that met his gaze.

On a rude bed at one side lay three chubby little children, their fair, curling hair streaming out over the pillows, the clothes kicked off and their pretty naked limbs sprawled about in all directions ; but notwithstanding all that was going forward, they slept as peacefully as though guarded by angels. Perhaps they were. In a rickety cradle made out of a biscuit-box standing on four thin legs lay a

baby, about eight weeks old, working feverishly with its tiny hands, and crying its little heart out unheeded.

Another bed stood over against the opposite wall, and at the moment when Scarlett peered in, Big Marsh, clothed only in a shirt, had his wife, who was in her nightdress, by the throat, and was forcing her down upon the edge of the bed and apparently choking her.

'I will!' he hissed savagely. 'I will, by . . . I will! So help me . . . I will! I'll cut your . . . throat first, then every one of the kids, then I'll set fire to the place an' cut me own throat to finish up. I will!—I will!—I swear by . . . I will! That'll be somethin' for the papers! That'll be somethin' for the Young Men's Christian Association! Now come on—I'm goin' to finish it!'

He flung her back on the bed, and turning swiftly, grasped an ugly-looking butcher's knife that lay on the table beside him.

The doomed woman shrieked and flung up her hands, but instead of the downward flash of the knife there came a sharp report. The blade flew from the murderer's grasp, and with a howl of pain he clapped his hand to his shirt-tails and bolted into the outer apartment.

But that shot requires explanation. When first the men began to make him their banker, John had been greatly exercised in his mind for fear his tent might be raided in the night and the money stolen, and in order to protect himself and the money left in his care, he decided at last to send to Melbourne for a small revolver and cartridges.

Like most Victorians, John had served a term in the cadets, and was a fairly good shot with a rifle, and expected no difficulty with a revolver.

But when he went to a lonely part of the hills in order to test himself with his six-shooter, he found it a totally different matter. An object he could have hit three times out of four at a hundred yards with a rifle, he could not hit at all with the revolver at a dozen. However, after an hour's practice he was satisfied he could hit a man two or three yards away, if need be, and that was the most he would ever be likely to require. So after cleaning up his weapon, he loaded it afresh and stuck it in his hip-pocket ready for use. Fortunately, however, there was no occasion to use it, and for some time past it had seemed like money thrown away.

But the event proved it was not, for when it seemed as though murder was to be committed before his eyes, he drew it forth, and thrusting the muzzle through the hole in the wall, took aim. His first impulse was to fire at Marsh's uplifted hand, but instinctively he knew he could not hit it. He could have shot him in the body, but he had no desire to kill him, so he directed his shot lower down, and by good fortune succeeded so well that Robin Hood or William Tell could not have done better.

Big Marsh roared like a bull, the woman shrieked afresh, and, the ordeal over, Scarlett's nerves broke down beneath the strain, and turning away, he darted into the scrub and ran like a hare for the cover of his tent. Having reached it, he ducked beneath the side at the imminent risk of getting a blow on the head from Garfield, who, waking suddenly, mistook him for a burglar. Tearing off his clothes, he jumped into bed without striking a light. A few whispered words explained the position to his startled companion, who was now fully awake.

'How if you've killed him?' he asked anxiously.

'Oh, I haven't killed him,' Scarlett replied, 'I've only—winged him; but he made such an infernal row, that the whole camp will be out in five minutes, and they'll probably want the medicine-chest.'

He was right. A few minutes later two half-dressed navvies were clamouring at the door for Scarlett to come with his 'tool'-chest. Scarlett, feigning great drowsiness and ignorance, learned, while slipping into his trousers and boots, that a burglar had entered the 'Blue Pig,' and upon Big Marsh waking up and going to see what was wrong, he had been shot with a revolver.

Scarlett fairly gasped at this version of the affair, but since it diverted suspicion from himself, he was not sorry. So he made haste to dress and go to the 'Blue Pig.' When he arrived upon the scene it had changed considerably. The tent was filled with an excited crowd. The three children were still sleeping peacefully, but the baby was being hushed in the arms of a woman from one of the boarding-houses. Marsh's wife, full of tenderness and anxiety (such is the way of women), was hovering about her brutal lord, doing what she could to relieve him, while Marsh himself, groaning dismally, lay face downward on the bed.

A very brief examination revealed the extent of the injury and set Scarlett's mind at rest. The little bullet was imbedded in the flesh, but if removed in time would do no more damage than if fired into the hind-quarters of a bullock. There was very little blood, and after Scarlett had dressed the wound and applied some ointment of a soothing character, Marsh appeared no less relieved in body than in mind.

There was no danger, Scarlett assured the wife

in response to her anxious inquiries, but it would be necessary for her husband to go to town tomorrow to a hospital to have the bullet extracted—and it would be a good many days before he would be able to sit down to his meals.

The navvies were clamouring for a description of the burglar so that a hunt might be made, but Marsh declared that, owing to the tent being in darkness at the time, he would be unable to identify him, and as to sending for the police, there were reasons, as they all knew, why he did not want the police humbugging about his place. Just what Big Marsh did believe or think about the matter it would be difficult to say.

The following morning everything was sold that was sellable, with the exception of a mattress and blankets, and late in the evening a number of men carried Marsh upon the mattress to a truck attached to an engine, and laid him on the floor. His wife and children were made as comfortable as possible round about him, and presently they went out of the life of the camp for ever.

Scarlett watched them go with mingled feelings. He felt that he had done an awful thing, and at one time was half inclined to go and surrender to the police, but in the end he reflected that if he had not fired when he did, Marsh would have killed his wife and possibly his children, and this was a small matter in comparison. Another blessing was, the 'Blue Pig' was now a thing of the past, and its accursed influence gone for ever. In the end Scarlett began to feel that his accidental appearance at the critical moment, together with his impulsive shot at the big shanty-keeper, had been carefully arranged by Providence.

As for the navvies, Marsh had no sooner gone his way than a rumour went abroad that the shot

they heard was merely the popping of the cork from a yeast-bottle, and that the wound had been inflicted by his wife with a pair of scissors, and this version of the affair many believe to this day.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A DAY IN CANVAS-TOWN

So time wore on, and the line began to near completion, and the end of the camp was in sight. Ferguson had made good. His rails were already at the pit-mouth ; the first truck of coals had been dispatched to Melbourne. Scarlett, eager to see the progress that had been made, took a day off and went down on a ballast-train to the fields, where, soon after his arrival, he chanced to meet the engineer in charge of the development work, and was invited to lunch.

In the interval he strolled about the canvas town, and marvelled at the prodigious progress that had been made. Unquestionably the man at the head of things was a genius. For twenty years this engineer had knocked about in the bush with a handful of men, making observations and writing reports that were pigeonholed and forgotten, and for twenty years he was just one of the staff. But his opportunity came when the national safety was at stake, and he took it with both hands. If the department had forgotten his discoveries, he had not, and when the crisis came, he, together with a Scotch colleague, sat up all night working out plans and estimates. In the morning he went the round of a number of big firms in the city and got options over all material required, and this

done, boldly pushed into the presence of the distracted Minister, and laid everything before him.

'Give me a free hand,' he said, 'and I'll land you all the coal you need here in the city in two months' time.'

The Minister was sceptical, but what could he do?

'Any port in a storm!' he muttered, as he signed the papers.

Here was the result. The development effected took Scarlett's breath away.

The lunch was served in a large tent, and served well, but every minute men entered for directions concerning different parts of the work, and the engineer ate his dinner, talked to Scarlett and settled questions offhand that at ordinary times a committee of ways and means would have argued over for weeks, and only settled after calling for reports. And it seemed to Scarlett that what Mr. Dingley had said concerning Mr. MacDonald was even truer of this engineer; for had the swift, accurate decision and genius for organisation displayed by him been exercised in the British Army, it would probably have placed him beside his illustrious namesake in the foremost rank of the generals.

After lunch the engineer hurried away, and Scarlett strolled round to call on the different ministers who were camped amongst the men, laying the foundations of the churches. The only wooden building in the place as yet was the Baptist church. In the shadow of it was a tent, and sharing the tent were the Baptist and Church of England ministers, the best chums in the world. So soon do men forget their differences when faced with a common difficulty.

From the ministers Scarlett learned that Mr.

Judson, the foremost of Australia's temperance orators, was to speak that night at a public meeting held to protest against the granting of a hotel licence, and lively times were expected. The liquor party had been canvassing the place with tremendous energy. Many of the miners and navvies were in favour of a licence, and had promised 'Juddy' a warm time, and Scarlett resolved to stay over for the meeting and go back on a late coal-train.

The gathering was held in a tent which the enterprising young Methodist minister had erected pending the building of a church. It would hold about two hundred people, but when Scarlett arrived he found about eight hundred trying to fight their way into it. A hostile crowd had arrived early and taken possession of all the seats, so that there was nothing for it but to roll up the sides of the tent and let everybody squeeze up as closely as they could. The result was a pushing, jostling, writhing mass of men resembling nothing so much as a tangle of fishworms in a tin.

Judson was late in coming, owing to a breakdown on the way, and the crowd beguiled the time by singing, to the tune of 'John Brown's Body'—

'We'll hang old Juddy to a sour apple-tree,
 We'll hang old Juddy to a sour apple-tree,
 We'll hang old Juddy to a sour apple-tree,
 And sell his hide for boots.
 Glory, glory, hallelujah !
 Glory, glory, hallelujah !
 We'll hang old Juddy to a sour apple-tree,
 And sell his hide for boots.'

Judson arrived in the midst of the chorus, and the reception he received, when wedged through the

crush and on to the platform by a squad of policemen, would have been enough to appal a Life Guardsman, for the crowd fairly rose and roared at him. But there was no sign of fear upon the thin, white face. 'Juddy' had faced too many hostile crowds in his day to fear this one, and, besides, he knew what he could do with a crowd. So he stood before them, a small, delicate, boyish figure, quietly waiting for the opportunity that sooner or later he knew must come. When it did, he had no fear for the result.

For a long time, notwithstanding the appeals of the mine manager, who was in the chair, speech was impossible ; but at length the uproar subsided to a certain extent, the silvery voice began, and a hush fell upon the crowd as they craned their necks forward to hear what he would say.

The trouble was not yet over, for many had come determined not to let him speak, and when they woke to the consciousness that they themselves were straining forward listening with all their ears, they renewed their shouts and cries. But it was too late, the spell was cast, and no power there could break it. 'Juddy' said his say, and having done so, there remained no more to be said. The licence was refused, and his bitterest opponents had to acknowledge his fairness and power.

'There's no doubt 'e's a wonder. You fancy 'im comin' it over that crowd like that !' a stout miner exclaimed as the crowd surged out into the night.

'The thing that knocks me senseless,' a second man began, 'is the size of 'im. W'y, 'e looks more like a kid of fifteen than a full-grown man, 'e—'

But here a voice that sounded familiar to Scarlett broke in—

'Size is nothink, an' you can't go by it. Wot

about the Ganger up at the Seventeen Mile? 'E's only a 'andful, but look wot 'e does! W'y, I was up at Nyora one night, an' 'e come bummin' into the billiard-room like as if 'e'd been shot out of a boardin'-house, an' 'e bumped Bill McGrar clear over the table, an'—'

Scarlett did not stay to hear the remainder. The time for his train to leave drew near, so he made his way along to the starting-point (station so far there was none), and was soon cosily ensconced in the cab of a big locomotive thundering out into the night.

CHAPTER XXXVII

BLUEBELL

As they ran into the Seventeen Mile, Scarlett was surprised to see that the Shanty and several other places were lit up, and when he alighted from the engine was at once aware that high revelry was in progress. His attempt to undo the flap of his tent resulted in a prolonged and startling ringing and rattling of pannikins and tin dishes. Then a voice from within called out in tones of deadly coldness—

‘As sure as ever you set a foot inside of this tent I'll split your skull, so 'elp me cat, I will ! ’

‘Whatever are you talking about, Garfield?’ Scarlett demanded in surprise.

‘Hello !’ the other responded quickly in a relieved tone. ‘It's you, Ganger?’

‘Yes. Whatever have you got the place barricaded up like this for?’

‘Come in,’ Garfield answered quickly, removing the barricade of tins and cans about the entrance, and untying the network of rope with which it was fastened.

‘No, don't strike a light !’ he added hastily ; ‘you might only bring them wretches down on us again, an' then we would 'ave a time.’

‘What wretches? What's the trouble?’ Scarlett asked again.

'Bluebell, an' 'er fancy men,' Garfield replied sententiously.

John whistled. 'Is she in the camp?'

'You bet she is!'

'I might have known as much when I saw the lights and heard the racket,' Scarlett responded. 'But why did you fortify yourself like this? Were you afraid she'd come in?'

'She was here doin' her darndest to get in,' Garfield responded; 'an' she would 'ave got in, only a row started up in the Shanty an' she went over to see wot the matter was an' forgot to come back.'

'What would you have done if she had got in?' Scarlett asked curiously.

'I'd 'ave hit 'er clean out in one smack,' Garfield replied deliberately. 'I would. So 'elp me cat!'

'You wouldn't hit a woman?'

'Woman! She ain't no woman! She's a kind of a—hy-eena! That's what she is. Look what she does with the men? No,' he added, with conviction, 'I'd think no more of givin' 'er one, if she come in 'ere, than what I would Joe the Goose if 'ee was tryin' it on.'

Bluebell was a kind of camp-follower who had achieved notoriety on a dozen railway lines, and was more dreaded than all the tugs and toughs put together. Scarlett heard of her within an hour of his arrival, and frequently wondered what manner of woman she was. One night his speculations were ended by her sudden appearance in the camp on one of her periodical visits.

The tent was full, the various games were in progress, and everything going with a swing, when suddenly a dead silence fell upon everybody, and

each man listened with all his ears. To Scarlett the voices told nothing, and he was about to inquire what was wrong when, moved by a sudden impulse, nearly every man in the place made a bolt for the back entrance and disappeared. In ten seconds, with the exception of Garfield, Hallum, and one or two others, the place was empty, and those who remained did so purely out of sympathy for John.

'What is it? What's the matter?' he demanded, looking from one to another.

'Bluebell!' one of the men replied significantly in a whisper, and the next moment she came into the tent.

John had often pictured her to himself, and had imagined a big blonde virago, somewhere in the twenties, coarse and vulgar to the finger-tips. The woman who entered the doorway was little, middle-aged, thin, spare, and almost refined in her appearance.

Scarlett looked at her in astonishment. Was it possible that this was the woman whose name was a synonym for terror in all the camps? He could scarcely credit it. He was prepared to be afraid of her, but she was so below his expectations that when she stood before him he was not a bit afraid, and Bluebell knew it in some way, and as a consequence was somewhat afraid of him. She was politeness and servility embodied as she stood before him. Scarlett, on the other hand, was calm and confident.

'Anything I can do for you?' he asked in matter-of-fact tones.

What Bluebell's motive was in entering the tent is hard to say. Quite possibly she intended wrecking it, but something in the atmosphere of the place or in Scarlett's appearance had overawed her,

and in response to his inquiry she answered meekly—

‘ Could you give me something to read? ’

‘ Yes,’ John replied promptly, ‘ I think I could. What kind of reading would you like? ’

Rather to his amazement she said she would prefer something religious. However, he set to work at once and made her up a decent parcel of good papers. She thanked him humbly and retired.

‘ Well, there isn’t anything very terrible about her,’ Scarlett remarked, turning to the others.

‘ You must ’ave mesmerised ’er, Ganger,’ Hallum replied. ‘ I’ve never seen ’er like that before. But don’t make any mistake about ’er ; there’ll be music in this camp before the mornin’. You take it from me.’

Hallum’s prediction was fulfilled. Soon after midnight Scarlett was awakened by the noise of battle in the direction of the Shanty, and as time wore on the disturbance increased. After a while came shouts of ‘ Murder! ’ and a little before day John suffered agonies of fear when he became aware that a section of the roysterers were approaching his tent. He sprang from his bunk, and, clutching his revolver, determined to shoot somebody if necessary to save himself from what he conceived might be their purpose. But his fears were vain : it was only a man with a broken head borne by four of his comrades, seeking the aid of Scarlett and his ‘ tool ’-chest.

John did what was possible for the man, and he was taken to his tent, and in the morning Bluebell went on her way ; but a number of her victims lay about, and bore her marks for many a day.

To-night it was quite certain something of the

kind would happen again. The noise across the way waxed louder and louder, and Scarlett sat on the side of his bunk debating as to whether he should turn in or not. The question was solved for him by a fresh outbreak of shouts and yells, cries of 'Murder!' and the frenzied shrieks of a woman. John's mind was made up, and first changing his revolver into the right-hand pocket of his coat, where it would be handy of access, he undid the flap of the tent and made his way across the line to the scene of the disturbance. He had several falls owing to the dark and the obstacles in the way, but arrived at the Shanty in time to see the climax.

The flap at the entrance was drawn aside, and Scarlett was able at a glance to take in the whole scene, and it was sordid and startling enough in all conscience. The place was fairly full. A keg of beer stood on a kind of rude table. Joe the Goose, his evil face haggard with nervousness, stood behind it. His eyes were intent upon the scuffle taking place before him, and he was calling nervously upon the others to 'ave a bit of common,' or to 'go out inter the scrub' if they wanted to murder one another.

Duckfoot Brown lay prone on the ground, groaning miserably, his face covered with blood, while Bluebell, flourishing a beer-bottle in her hand, her hair dishevelled, her face white and intense and looking the incarnation of evil, stood in the centre of a group of half-drunken men, who were doing their best to quieten her. It was evident that Duckfoot had in some way offended her, and had paid the usual penalty, though how she was able to bring about the downfall of a great man such as he John could not divine. But he was not long in learning her secret.

Joe the Goose suddenly caught sight of Scarlett in the doorway, and somehow gaining courage from his presence, came from behind the table and shouted in the half-defiant, half-apologetic tone of the true bully, uncertain of his ground—

'Look 'ere, Bluebell, I'm not goin' to 'ave my place git a bad name. I——'

Bluebell heard him above the babel of voices round her, and flung about at once in a frenzy.

'What?' she screamed, as she advanced upon him. 'What did you say?'

'I only said I didn't want any trouble in my place,' Joe replied meekly, retreating before her.

But this reply only enraged her the more. Her livid face twitched as though she were in the grip of a convulsion fit, rage choked her for a moment, then she broke out into a stream of invective and cursing that positively singed and burned. Then suddenly with tigerish swiftness and strength she brought the bottle she was holding crashing down upon Joe the Goose's head, and he fell like a log at her feet. Before any one had realised what had happened she flung herself upon him like a wild beast and struck another blow.

The others were so drunk that, had it depended upon their efforts to save him, Joe the Goose would then and there have gone to give an account of his shanty-keeping to God. But just then Scarlett intervened. He had stood at the door, unnoticed of any save Joe, looking in wonder, not unmixed with fear, at the sordid scene before him. The first blow was struck so swiftly that Joe was stretched out before Scarlett realised what was taking place, but he sprang at once to the rescue, and although too late to save the shantyman from a second blow, he was able to prevent a third. Seizing Bluebell by the shoulders just as she was

about to deliver it, he swung her round and hurled her right across the place, scattering the men like skittles, while the bottle, flying from her hand, struck a stout navvy on the side of the head, filling his horizon with stars of the first magnitude.

Bluebell, fairly screaming with rage, flashed round instantly to confront her new antagonist, but at sight of him she shrank back. Just what it was about Scarlett that overawed her it would be difficult to say. Possibly the explanation may be found in Tennyson's words—

‘ His strength was as the strength of ten,
Because his heart was pure.’

At all events, conscious guilt is shorn of much of its strength when opposed to purity and innocence. And possibly when Bluebell looked upon John's innocence and thought of her own guilt, when she saw what he was and what she was, a kind of fear of him came upon her.

As for Scarlett, if Bluebell, fearing the face of no man, yet feared him, he, timid and fearful of most, had yet no fear of her, and he stood over her now, blazing with wrath and indignation.

‘ What do you mean, you—you baggage? ’ he shouted. ‘ What *do* you call yourself? Oh, you’re a nice woman! ’ he went on with contempt. ‘ Why don’t you stay at home’ (she had a home) ‘ and look after your home instead of plaguing and cursing this camp? ’

He paused for breath, but Bluebell made no reply, only her face twitched uneasily, and she glanced longingly at the door. Then Scarlett went on again.

‘ Look here! ’ he cried, ‘ we’ve had enough of you—more than enough. There’s the door, and out

you get. I'll give you till daylight to get clear away, and if you're still in the camp, or ever come back to it while I'm here, you'll be ducked in the water-tank—you will, Bluebell, as sure as you live. Now get !'

There was no need to say more. Without raising her eyes and without a word Bluebell went out into the dark, and the camp knew her no more. Then Scarlett turned to the men, who all the time had looked on, silent and amazed.

'I hope you're satisfied,' he said, looking scornfully at them. 'Your people would be proud of you. But this is no good,' he added, turning away. 'We'll have to do something for these beauties. You, Dan, and you, Jim,' he said, addressing two of the most sober, 'go across to my camp and ask Garfield for the medicine-chest, and we'll see what we can do for them.'

Both the sufferers were by this time sitting up in a dazed fashion, and after such attention as Scarlett was able to give them, were helped away to bed, sick and sorry, but, alas ! with the great lesson unlearned.

The light of a cold day was stealing over the hills and the valley as Scarlett made his way back to his tent, and, thoroughly exhausted, flung himself on his bunk, pulled the 'possum-rug over himself, and speedily fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE YANK TAKES A HAND

THE first two months at the Seventeen Mile passed rapidly away. So far as Scarlett was concerned they were months wherein he drank sweet waters and bitter in about equal parts. Human nature, as old Martin Luther says in his bluff fashion, is like a drunken peasant—if you put him up on one side of his horse he will fall off on the other ; and whoever has to work with men for their spiritual and temporal good will speedily find out how true are the stout reformer's words.

To Scarlett the discovery came as a bitter disappointment, and time and again when some man whom he had laid hold of and carefully shepherded for a fortnight would, after all, go down before the first breath of temptation and repay all his solicitude with abuse, he began to wonder if men were worth the trouble he was taking with them. The Bishop was the worst sinner in this respect. His culture and talents naturally attracted Scarlett, and for him he laboured more than all. Yet with but little result, so far as he could see. However, he did not despair, and on the whole he was aware that much good was being done, though more, perhaps, in the way of prevention than of cure.

No attempt was made to hold revival meetings.

In such a community that were impossible, but in a quiet way John did a good deal of personal work, and in the end personal work probably counts for most. Then, too, notwithstanding all his deficiencies of flesh and spirit, his influence daily became greater. Prior to his coming, for example, two-up had seized the men like a pestilence, and was played openly in the camp, particularly upon a Sunday. But soon after the gamblers retired to a secluded spot away out of his sight. Returning from the hills one afternoon, he came upon them in the midst of it, and stood by to watch the play. It went on half-heartedly for a time, then they gave it up, ashamed.

Later on Scarlett talked about the matter at the Sunday night meeting, and part of his remonstrance undoubtedly reached the spot. 'What sort of man is he,' he asked, 'who will work side by side with his mate for a fortnight, drink out of the same billy, share his food, receive all kinds of help from him, and then in the end take every penny of his hard-earned money from him on the chance spin of a coin? Call him a man? Call him a mate? I call him the meanest kind of a thief?'

This speech roused various feelings—resentment in those who had been winning, a sense of injury in those who had lost their money, and a measure of reflection in all. Two-up still went on amongst its devotees, but it had received a heavy blow, and many (the younger men in particular) gave it up altogether.

At this time, too, an interesting duel, or what appeared to be one, was in progress between the Yank and Joe the Goose. From his first appearance on the platform the night of the bun struggle, the majority of the men believed the

Yank to be a revenue officer, and treated him accordingly. The 'spotters' reported at once to the Shanty and the 'Blue Pig,' and from that hour he was closely watched. Men were not slow to tell him what they believed him to be, of course, but the little American repelled the insinuation with scorn, and endeavoured to settle down in the camp like any other man.

It was in vain. They only suspected him the more. Then one spotter after another came to him in a 'friendly' way and advised him to leave the place and go elsewhere. There were some rough men about, they hinted, and they hadn't taken to him, and he might get a crack over the head some night.

But the Yank was not to be bluffed. 'I'd like to see 'em try it on,' he said coldly, swelling out his diminutive chest. Then he carried the war into the enemy's camp.

One hot night he deliberately pushed his way into the 'Blue Pig,' and addressing the gigantic Marsh in fatherly tones, said—

'Say, son, my inside's like a desert in a ten-year drought. *Carn't* you gimme a drink?'

'Kola or tea?' Marsh asked suavely when he had recovered his breath.

'Kola be . . . !' the other replied. 'Fire-water.'

'Sorry,' Marsh replied, 'but I don't keep it.' Nor could the Yank, for all his pleading, move Big Marsh an inch.

He had no better success at the Shanty, either, for notwithstanding the fact that a number of half-drunken men were lounging about the place when he went in, and the reek of spirits filled the air, Joe the Goose persisted in denying that he sold, or ever had sold, spirituous liquors.

' 'Ow could I w'en it's agen the lor?' he demanded with an air of limpid innocence.

And even when the Yank called him 'a . . . liar,' and invited him out to 'the place where the bull feeds,' that he might prove it with his fists, Joe held his peace. For the Yank, as the Yank, he professed to his intimates, he did not care a tinker's curse—but the Yank as detective was a different proposition. So the gentleman in question went to his tent like a certain king of old time, heavy and displeased.

Now, whether the Yank was really a revenue officer sent down by the Premier in response to Mr. Dingley's letter, or just what he professed to be, an ordinary working-man, Scarlett never knew, nor anybody else in the camp, for that matter ; but 'give a dog a bad name and you might as well hang him,' and let a certain thing be generally believed concerning any man, and in some respects he might as well be that at once. The Yank was believed to be a detective, and consequently everything he did was, in the eyes of the spotters, and indeed of the camp generally, fraught with sinister meaning. If he spent an evening in the Social Hall, it was clear he was merely trying to allay suspicion. If he failed to put in an appearance, it was equally clear he was up to some trickery elsewhere. If he lay reading in his tent, he was plainly hatching some diabolical plot to entrap them; and if he were not in his tent, who could doubt that he was spying round somewhere for fresh evidence? If he failed to turn up to work, it was because he expected his 'cobbers,' and a raid was imminent. If he went to work, he was just biding his time. If he wrote a letter, it undoubtedly contained 'instructions.' If he expected a letter, it was the 'warrant.'

The result of all this was to create a state of tension such as the drink-weakened nerves of the shantyites found very difficult to endure. Fear was on every side. Nor was the Yank slow to understand the position. If, as they supposed, he was a detective, it is probable that, despairing of gaining their confidence, he had determined to work upon their fears. But if, on the contrary, he was what he professed to be, then it is evident he had concluded it was as well to play the game as get the name, and was determined to have revenge for their shabby treatment of him.

Accordingly he began to be much engrossed in a mysterious black notebook which he carried in his shirt next his breast. A guileless spotter strolling round a clump of scrub would find him seated on a secluded log, busily writing with a stump of pencil. Directly, however, a step was heard, the Yank would spring up with every appearance of confusion, hurriedly stuff the book into his shirt, and in an awkward way endeavour to pass the matter off.

A few days later he began to inquire persistently of Scarlett whether a letter in a 'long blue envelope' had come for him, this inquiry being invariably made in a 'pig's whisper,' that just contrived to reach the ears of the ubiquitous spotter who was engrossed in a paper close by, who immediately detailed it to headquarters. Then one evening the camp was startled by a succession of revolver shots, and rushing out, discovered the Yank with a leaf of his notebook pinned on a gum-tree, the which he was endeavouring, and not without success, to transform into a five of clubs.

'I was afraid my shootin' was goin' off,' he said in response to an inquiry by Scarlett, who had joined the crowd that quickly gathered to him.

'An' I don't want that. You never can tell what's ahead.'

'Well, I guess you haven't gone off any,' Scarlett replied admiringly as he examined the paper; and then, as a thought struck him: 'Do you always carry your gun about with you?'

'Always,' the Yank replied—'an' sleep with 'er at night, with my finger on the pull,' this with a sidelong glance at Joe the Goose.

Nor was it lost upon him. Indeed, the whole thing was done for Joe's especial benefit, and was thoroughly effective, for whatever designs they may have had against the Yank were now discarded, it being agreed that a man who could shoot like that would be a bad man to tackle.

Big Marsh's problem in regard to the Yank was solved by Scarlett in the manner described elsewhere, and in some respects that gentleman was not sorry, for he was worried half out of his wits. In all probability, too, the Yank would have borne the odium of that mysterious outrage had it not been that at the moment when the shot rang out he was, for the fiftieth time, beseeching Joe the Goose to sell him a drink, averring that his tongue was 'hangin' out like the tongue of a boot!'

But with the 'Blue Pig' out of the way, Joe the Goose's troubles increased. Hitherto Big Marsh had shared them; now he was all alone. The place was full of eyes, and each one glared at him. Every buggy that rattled down the road contained the detectives; every newcomer was another spy. The Yank had got on his nerves.

When Friday came things reached a climax. Joe had ordered beer from Bass, and arranged for its delivery at an hour when the Yank would be away with his gang. But the Yank did not

go out that day, and when the cart approached and Joe came out of the Shanty to take delivery, to his horror the Yank was sitting by the roadside, turning over the leaves of that dreadful black book. There was nothing for it but to signal the driver to go right on, which he did. The Yank looked up with disappointment on his face.

'Say, Joe,' he cried, 'I *am* disappointed. I thought that cart was sure enough bringin' you some firewater in the bar'l, but it seems it don't belong here.'

With an animal-like snarl and an expression of hate, Joe the Goose made his way back to the Shanty. But flesh and blood could endure no more. Early next morning Scarlett learned the great news that he had bolted some time during the night, and, moreover, that he had 'scaled' the boarding-house and the storekeeper to the tune of twenty pounds. Later on in the day the Yank came across to inquire for a letter, but this time he did not particularise the shape or colour of the envelope. Scarlett regarded him steadfastly.

'I don't know, Mr. Lovelock,' he said, 'whether you are a detective in disguise, or just what you make yourself out to be, but I want to tell you this: I'm eternally grateful to you for coming to this camp.'

The Yank's leathery countenance broke into a smile, but he vouchsafed no reply, and a few days later he, too, mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXIX

JOHN RECEIVES A LETTER

So, as has been said, Scarlett drank sweet waters and bitter, but this last, the closing of the shanties, was very sweet to his soul. And now, he told himself, with the shanties out of the way and Sheila close by to inspire and cheer him, he would work to some purpose. It was well for him then, seeing he was a man in earnest, that he had not waited for a clear field in order to begin his work ; in that case nothing had been done. For, as a matter of fact, his opportunities, in this direction at least, were now gone for ever.

The very night after Joe the Goose had 'scaled ' Scarlett found a letter in the mail-bag from the General, requiring him to hand over the work to Mr. Robert Darby, who was being sent down to take charge, and to report himself to headquarters. The explanation given of this unexpected development was that the General had learned that the camp at the Seventeen Mile was shortly to be broken up, the work being practically finished. But his (Scarlett's) work had been so entirely successful, and the Board had received so many independent testimonies to his ability and great personal influence, that they were desirous of retaining his services permanently. Doubtless other railway work would be undertaken in the future,

but in the meantime there was a vacancy on the staff at headquarters, which must be filled at once, and they wished him to report himself as soon as possible after Mr. Darby's arrival, which would be in a few days at most.

To say that John was overwhelmed is but a feeble way of indicating the state of mind into which this communication flung him. His first impulse was to stay on and see the job through in defiance of the Board, but on second thoughts he decided it would be best to go ; for, after all, the work would come to an end with the completion of the ballasting, which was now only a matter of little time, and obedience to orders would mean an opportunity for similar work in the near future.

'And anyhow,' he cried triumphantly, 'the General admits I've made good—it's here in black and white !'

But the summons precipitated the need for action in a matter which lately had been haunting him like a nightmare. This was nothing more nor less than the necessity for speaking to Mr. MacDonald about Sheila ; and after the first shock of the General's letter had worn off he began to face the inevitable. He could not leave the camp without speaking, yet he feared that to speak meant to lose Sheila out of his life for ever. As has been seen, John was a pessimist as regards himself, and turn it how he would, he could not see how an ambitious father could possibly be content with a poor match for his daughter.

'If I had wealth,' he groaned, 'it would be another matter ; but what are my few poor hundreds? If I had a position worthy of her, or great expectations, or were even anything to look at myself, it might be different, but as it is . . .'

Nevertheless speak he must, but of all the

ordeals John had ever contemplated in his life this was certainly the hardest. Compared with it, the bearding of the lions in the 'Old Bull and Bush' was a kindergarten. Nevertheless it must be done, and he resolved to do it at once. He would go up to the camp to-night, and for the time being let the Social Centre look after itself. Fortunately, now it could do that without difficulty.

In the meantime he informed such men as were about that he had orders to quit, and would be gone in a few days. The news was received with consternation, which quickly spread through the camp, and in the evening, when Scarlett had gone up to the MacDonalds, the gathering in the tent resolved itself into a meeting to see what was to be done.

'If the camp wos goin' to last,' old Bob declared, 'we'd keep 'im with us if we 'ad to pay 'ees screw ourselves ; but seein' it's just petered out, the only thing for it is to give 'im a good send-off an' let 'im go.'

As there seemed no appeal from this, the others perforce had to agree, and the question then arose as to the nature of the 'send-off.'

'Whatever we do,' Andy Callander observed, 'it will have to be somethin' worth while—some-thin' this camp won't be ashamed to ask him to take.'

'I think we berrer gib 'im a money-purse of sobrens,' Black Rudolph interposed excitedly.

'Not a bad idea neither, Snowdrop,' Billy Sandes remarked approvingly ; 'the only thing is, where are we goin' to git 'em?'

'I smack one down, ennyow,' Rudolph responded in challenging tones.

'Then, by cinnamon, if you do, I'll cover it !' Duckfoot Brown roared at once. 'I ain't goin'

to play second shovel to no white Australian livin'.'

' Seems to me,' Garfield said, 'somebody had better go round with the bell-topper.'

' That's all right,' old Bill broke in impatiently ; ' we can easy enough give 'im a bag full of quids, if that's all we're goin' to do. But wot about a farewell meetin' an' speeches? Somebody ought to git up an' tell 'im wot we think of 'im, an' somebody ought to second it. Couldn't we git up a kind of shivoo? '

' Wot we want,' the gentleman who was introduced earlier in the story as 'Sam' declared, 'is a syndicate'—Sam was an ex-miner—'a syndicate to draw up rules an' regulashuns.'

' Committee, you mean,' George corrected him.

' Committee or any darn thing you like,' Sam retorted impatiently, 'so long as they git a promenade on an' do the thing.'

And so it was arranged at length. A committee was appointed with power to collect money and arrange a programme for a send-off, to be held the following Friday night.

All unconscious of these proceedings, John was anxiously drawing near to the MacDonald camp. His nervousness was so great as almost to produce nausea, and it was with a fevered brow and dry lips that he approached the clearing. In a way he felt that his life for good and all would be made or marred in the next half-hour, and it was impossible for him to view the ordeal with any degree of equanimity.

In the last fringe of shadows he stood a moment, and, lifting up his eyes to heaven, prayed that God would give him grace for whatever came, good or bad. Then he started out across the moonlit space between the bush and the camp.

Not the least of the trial before him consisted in going to the door and formally asking to see the manager alone. That would be so unusual that all would remark it, and he dreaded the questioning looks. However, he learned again the folly of crossing a stream before reaching it, for he scarce had left the shadows before a figure, which he knew at once to be that of the man he was seeking, emerged from one of the tents and came briskly towards him on the way downhill.

'It's you, John!' the manager cried cheerily as he drew near. 'Whatever brings you here at this hour? Not but that I'm glad to see you,' he added.

'I came—to see you,' John managed to gasp.

'But don't you always come to see me?' the manager replied, with a measure of banter in his tones that John was too worried to notice. 'I'm the only man on the place, and everybody knows you simply can't be bothered with womenfolks.'

'That's all a mistake,' the unhappy John broke in. 'I don't dislike women. I love them—at least, one of them. I love your daughter, Mr. MacDonald,' he blurted out, 'and I've come up to tell you so and ask if you have any objection to us being married?'

Whether the announcement had taken the manager's breath away, or it is only that he was considering his answer, is uncertain. What is certain is that he stood still in the pathway for a considerable length of time, staring at the young man before him, ere he made any attempt to answer the question, and in the end he answered it by asking another.

'What does Sheila think of the matter?' he inquired.

'She thinks the same of me as I do of her,'

John replied, and added, 'though it's a mystery to me why she does. I'm not half worthy of her.'

'You're right there, John,' the father replied frankly. 'You're not half worthy of her—not that I've anything against you, John, but I've never seen the man yet that was half worthy of her. But I've business at the mine to-night, and am due there shortly, and if you'll walk along we can talk about your affairs and I'll see.'

They turned then and set off along the track that led to the mine, and in response to leading questions Scarlett told him the story of his life, and it did not escape him that, although the manager made full inquiries as to his financial position and prospects, yet it was about his health and former manner of life that he seemed most anxious to be informed.

'A good banking account is a fine asset, John,' he said, 'I'll not deny that, but it's a poor thing tacked on to a filthy disease and weakened manhood. Aye,' he added, as his manner was, 'I had rather give Sheila to a man without a doit any day, if he had a clean mind in a sound body, than to a millionaire without them.'

Still, he had said neither yea nor nay, and John's anxiety was intense. However, when they came in sight of the mine, the manager halted in the middle of the track and looked him squarely in the face.

'It's not easy, John,' he said, 'for a father to consent to part with such a child as Sheila, especially when she's all we have; but I knew it must come from some quarter sooner or later, and I don't know any man I'd rather give her to than yourself, and besides, you haf a kind of claim to her, for you safed her life. Well, you haf my consent,' he said, extending his hand, 'so you'd better be away now and tell her so. You'll

had no trouble with her mother. She has wanted to adopt you ever since you dragged Sheila out of the sea.'

John's thanks were fervent if brief and rather lamely expressed, and the next moment he was running back to the MacDonald camp as though a band of bushrangers were at his heels—while the father, with bowed head and thoughtful steps, made his way to the mine.

CHAPTER XL

SCARLETT'S SHIVOO

THE 'syndicate' to which the task of arranging the farewell to Scarlett had been entrusted went to work as men of whom great things were expected. The result was, that when Friday came they had not only collected a purse of sovereigns, but arranged a programme which for length and variety excelled anything hitherto given in the camp. In addition they had spread the news throughout the hills amongst the Cockies, and as a consequence a great crowd of old and young came down the night of the farewell, in order to take a last look at Scarlett and to say goodbye.

There were the Petersons from down the line, the Baxters from their snug farm across the range, the Halkeths from the Red Hill, the Dingleys from Mount Pleasant, and many others whose interest had been stirred in the unpretentious young man who came to camp amongst the navvies and fight the shanties. Nor did they fail to do their share towards the purse of sovereigns.

It was well the syndicate had lost no time in their preparations, for, as the event proved, Friday was Scarlett's last day. Mr. Darby arrived that morning to take over control, and John must needs leave by the first train on Saturday.

And after all, he went about his preparations

for departure with a light heart. The work was practically over, it had been undeniably successful, and he was able now to look forward to the future with a good deal more equanimity than he had a week before. He had wondered many a time what he should turn to when this work was done, and now that matter was settled. His future was assured, and in a sphere entirely to his liking.

Then the great uncertainty as to how the Mac-Donalds would regard his relations with Sheila, which had lain like a load upon his spirit and filled his days and nights with apprehension, was now gone for ever. Instead of the separation his fears had prophesied, he had been adopted into the heart of a family more desirable in his eyes than royalty itself.

Mr. MacDonald's prediction that he would find no difficulty with Sheila's mother proved correct, for when, after leaving that gentleman, he had come panting into their presence to tell them the great news, he found that lady quite ready to take him to her heart. Nor was it such news to her as the young people imagined. They, ostrich-like, had hidden their heads, and imagined that none could see or suspect, whereas the thing was the talk of the camp and the countryside, and the parents had already been congratulated times without number. But, like wise people, after talking the matter over in all its bearings and approving Sheila's choice, they had let things take their course, confident that John would do the honest thing when the right time came. So there was nothing for the mother to do but to tell him with tears of genuine joy how glad she was, and then, drawing them both to her, pray that the grace of God might be upon them and make them happy.

Surely it is an omen of good things to come

when a young couple begin their engagement amid the tears and blessings of godly parents.

As for Sheila, while she rejoiced greatly that 'daddy' had given his consent, yet the thought of the speedy parting diminished her joy considerably. However, this in turn was tempered by her father, who, returning before John had left for home, assured her they would themselves be back in town not later than the 1st of June.

So, as has been said, it was with comparative lightness of heart that John went about his preparations for departure. He was to be farewelled by the men that night, he knew, but of the extensive preparations he knew nothing, neither was he aware of the purse of sovereigns. He anticipated the usual crowd of men, a few kind words said by some one on their behalf, a song or two, selections on the phonograph, his own brief response—nothing more.

His surprise was great on returning after tea to find a gang of men clearing the tent as though a crowd was expected. Then he learned that some of the Cockies were likely to put in an appearance, and shortly afterwards the prediction was verified. First among the outsiders, Scarlett was amazed to see his future father and mother-in-law, together with Sheila, who darted at him a look which said, 'Here's a surprise for you!' Then he knew that something more was afoot than he had bargained for, and resigned himself to the worst—or the best.

So the crowd gathered and the performance began, for it was a performance such as, for uproarious laughter and fun, could not be surpassed anywhere; and withal, acting as a balance and set-off to it all, there was a deep note of sorrow and regret, even of devotion, so that refinement was

never lacking nor tears far remote from the wildest outbursts of hilarity.

Sheila's song, for instance, produced an extraordinary effect, and might have been the prelude to a revival meeting had such a purpose been in view. It was only a kind of parody on the old Spanish love-song 'Juanita,' and sung to that tune ; but let any sing it over once or twice and they will know its power.

'O My Redeemer ! what a friend Thou art to me :
 O what a refuge I have found in Thee !
 When the way was dreary
 And my heart was sore oppressed,
 'Twas Thy voice that lulled me
 To a calm, sweet rest.

Nearer, draw nearer,
 Till my soul is lost in Thee,
 Nearer, draw nearer
 Blessed Lord, to me.

When, in their beauty, stars unveil their silver light,
 Then, O my Saviour, grant me songs at night,
 Songs of yonder mansions,
 Where the dear ones gone before,
 Sing Thy praise for ever
 On the peaceful shore.

O my Redeemer ! when the last deep shadows fall,
 And in the silence I shall hear Thy call,
 In Thine arms enfolding
 Let me breathe my life away,
 And awake triumphant
 In eternal day.'

At the end of the programme old Bob, who was in the chair, begged leave to make a few remarks. Then in plain, manly words he told Scarlett of their

great regret that he was leaving them, their appreciation of the work he had done, and their hope he would be with them again in their next camp, whether it were north at Ouyen, east at Orbost, out on the western plains, or away on the great trans-continental. In conclusion, he asked the astounded Scarlett to accept a purse of sovereigns as a slight token of their regard, and expressed the wish of the men that a part of the money might be expended in buying a medal and having it inscribed with the words—

‘To JOHN SCARLETT, “Ganger,”
with the warm regards
of the men of the camp
at the Seventeen Mile.’

There was tremendous cheering as old Bob finished, and the stalwart navvy and the slender missionary stood, both of them visibly affected, hand clasped in hand.

The ‘seconder’ of Bob’s address was the gentleman described previously in these pages as the ‘Pirate,’ he who, the night of Scarlett’s first appearance, had asked for the words of ‘Abide with me.’ Pushing his way to the platform now, he mounted it with the air of a man tackling a rather awkward job.

‘I’m ‘ere, boys,’ he began, ‘to say “Right oh !” to everything Bob has said about the Ganger.’ (“Hear, hear !”) ‘*You* all know wot ‘e is.’ (“Hear !”) ‘*You* all know wot ‘e’s done.’ (Applause.) ‘*You* all know wot this camp was before ‘e come.’ (Cries of “Don’t we just !”) ‘Wot with shanties, an’ “Blue Pigs,” an’ pigs of another colour, a man’s life wos ‘ardly safe to call ‘is own.’ (Great applause from Mr. Dingley.)

'So far as I'm concerned myself I may say I wasn't a model to bring up children by.' (A voice : "No, you wasn't !") Great laughter.) 'I wos a wretch—I wos a skunk—in fact, I wos a damn rascal altogether.' (Sensation and great uproar.) 'An' now—' (A voice : "Now you're a angel !") Great laughter.) 'No, I'm blowed if I am, but I keep clear of the shanties, an' two-up, an' manage to send a bit of money home to the wife.' (Loud applause.)

'Now about the Ganger.' (Cheers.) 'I hardly know 'ow to say what we think about 'im, but this is the kind of man Mr. Scarlett is : If you wos in Melbourne stony broke, an' with a fat head—well, I believe 'e'd stand you a pint.' (More cheers and laughter.)

'There's another thing. Wile Mr. Scarlett's been down 'ere, it seems 'e's managed to cotton on to a nice young tart.' (Prolonged applause and cries of "'Ow do you know ?") ' 'Ow do I know ? Well, if you'd seen 'em trackin' round as orfen as wot I 'ave, you wouldn't trouble your silly fat 'ead to arsk a question like that. But wot I want to say is, that if ever they git switched up together, an' we're within cooee, we'll all turn up to dance at the weddin'. And anyway, we wish them both a long life an' a happy one, any amount of money, an' a family like Jerry Ryan's—seven girls and nine boys.' (Collapse of Scarlett and Sheila. Terrific uproar, during which the Pirate, feeling he had made a mess of things, escaped through the back opening.)

But, after all, he had expressed in a way which many understood best the feelings of the camp. But it was natural that when Scarlett rose to reply he could scarcely trust himself to speak. Under the circumstances, he thought it best to omit all

reference to the remarks of the Pirate, and going back to the beginning with deep feeling, he told them the story of his coming—how it was all a mistake in the first place ; of the dreadful accounts he had heard of them, and of his fears ; then how their kindness had encouraged him to go on.

'I heard it said you were beasts,' he cried. 'But I didn't find beasts—I found men the same as their fellows, only more beset with temptation and with fewer possibilities of escape.'

Then he told them, to their delight, that the camp had worked wonders for him. It had knocked out a lot of silly nonsense and gone a long way towards making a man of him. As to the purse of sovereigns, it touched him more than they could realise, because he knew well it was in many cases given out of their own deep need ; for what with wet weather, broken time, and two homes to keep, no man had much to spare out of nine shillings a day. He had not looked for money, as they knew, but he was proud to take it, and the medal he would wear with pride to the end of his days.

As Scarlett stepped down from the platform the Bishop struck up, 'For he's a jolly good fellow,' and everybody, springing to their feet, sang it with tremendous enthusiasm. 'Auld Lang Syne' followed, and then, after a little preliminary fingering of the keys, the Bishop glided into 'Abide with me.' They sang it with evident emotion, and at the conclusion Scarlett prayed that God would abide with them all. "When other helpers fail"—and they do fail—"and comforts flee"—and they do flee—"Help of the helpless, O abide with us." The benediction followed.

Afterwards he went down to the door, and shook

hands with each as they passed out, and had he doubted the sincerity of their affection up to that moment, his doubts must then have been dispelled by their strong handgrips, and fervent goodbyes, and 'God bless you's.'

There were special friends, however, such as Andy Callander, Mr. Dingley, and others, who were not to be dismissed with a handshake at the door. To these he returned, and for some time gave himself up to them ; but at length they too had gone, and as Scarlett was to stay that night at the MacDonalds', he hurried out to where the girl of his heart stood proudly awaiting him.

CHAPTER XLI

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

LEAVING the camp behind, they bent their steps for the last time up the hill road. The moon, shining in her strength, filled the world with soft, beautiful light, save in the bush, where, beneath the trees, the dusty track was mottled with shadows. Before them, far up the way, they could hear the laughter and calling of those who had gone before, while behind, the camp grew quiet and settled down to sleep. The night was crisp, and so still that the sound of a stick crackling beneath their feet rang out like a pistol-shot.

They had much to say to each other, and but little time now in which to say it. Nevertheless, but few words were said by either of them, but they held each other closely as they walked, and the silence was eloquent. The old people had gone on long before, and when John and Sheila reached the camp, were sitting in the kitchen, where Phemie had left a fire burning when she went to bed.

' You don't mind coming in here, John? ' the mother cried, as they came to the door.

John did not mind in the least. In fact, he preferred a kitchen to a drawing-room, if one could judge by the fervour with which he disclaimed any objection to it. The mother was evidently gratified.

'Well, after all,' she said, 'it's a compliment to be invited into the kitchen, for in some respects it's the most sacred place in the home. Anyway, we never invite anybody there unless we think a great deal of them.'

John trusted he would ever prove himself worthy to be invited into the kitchen, and, Mrs. MacDonald having expressed her confidence that he would, he entered the sacred domain—and a comfortable place he found it.

Mr. MacDonald had seated himself beside the fire in a deck-chair, and when John entered was getting out of his boots into a pair of slippers. Another chair stood on the opposite side, and he motioned John to it.

'Sit down, man !' he cried heartily, 'and have a smell of the fire. It's sharp out to-night. Ay, we'll soon be having it cold enough,' he added.

'Well, I won't be sorry,' John replied. 'I like the heat, but I can always work best in winter, and I want to work now as I never worked before.'

'Ay, well, that's it. They say that everything comes to the man who can wait. I say everything waits for the man who can work. When I wass twelve years old, John, I wass a bare-legged laddie, minding a handful of sheep in Skye, and if it hadn't been that I wass eager to work, I might haf been minding a handful of sheep in Skye to-day. Work is the key that unlocks all the doors, John, and in this land any man may be anything he will, if he hass fair judgment and good health and a mind to work. The difference between the men who succeed here and the men who fail is just this,' he continued : 'the failures believe in an eight-hour day, and when they get it in, they never do another hand's turn ;

the others believe in an eight-hour day and work sixteen—like their wives,' he added, as an after-thought.

' You think, then,' John remarked, ' that the man who limits himself to working eight hours a day can never be anything but a workman? '

' I'm sure of it,' the other replied with conviction. ' A man gets what he goes after, if he goes after it with sufficient determination ; and if a man insists on working eight hours a day, well, he'll work eight hours a day for the term of his natural life ; but if he determines on making a competency, if it means eighteen hours a day, well, he'll get his competency, and please himself then whether he'll work or not.'

Much of this was new to John, and required thinking out, so he made no reply, but sat staring into the fire, turning it over in his mind. After a time Mr. MacDonald leaned across and tapped him on the knee.

' I wass inquiring into your affairs the other day, John,' he said, in a confidential voice, glancing round at the others, who were busily preparing supper, ' and fair's fair. I want you to know that if I work now, it's because I choose to work, and not that there's any real necessity ; and mother and I are thinking that after I get this place in working order, we'll take a trip home. We're both wearyin' for a sight of the heather, and won't be satisfied until we get it. To-night, when that soldier fellow sang about "When the hills are white with heather and the dew is on the brae," it went to my heart, and when I looked at mother the tears were in her eyes, too. We had been planning to go next February, and take Sheila with us. We'd have little heart for it without her, and the home folk all want to see her.'

Poor John ! At this announcement his heart sank like a stone in a pool. If Sheila went away, she would never come back to him, he felt sure, and he moved uneasily in his seat. 'But the father went on—

'Mother and I have been talking the matter over, and what we would like is this : that you and Sheila fix things up by that time and come with us. You could combine business with pleasure. I'm sure it would widen your outlook to study other methods and see how they're doing this work of yours in the old land and in America. What do you think ? '

What could he think ? From the depths he was suddenly lifted to the heights, and suspended gasping. It had been the desire of his life to visit the home of his fathers and to go to America, and to realise it under such circumstances seemed more in the nature of a dream than anything else. His thoughts rose like a whirlwind, and before he could calm them sufficiently to frame a suitable reply they were called to supper, and with a radiant face and kindling eyes he sat down.

'What's the matter with John ? ' the mother cried, as she caught sight of the flush on his face.

'I've just been telling him about our little plan, Alison, and he thinks he may consider it,' the father answered.

'Consider it ! ' John cried excitedly. ' Consider it ! Why—'

'What plan is this ? ' Sheila asked demurely, though with a degree of apprehension in her voice not usual with her.

'Why,' the father answered, 'your mother wants you to be married about Christmas-time and go with us to Europe and America.'

Had a lyddite shell burst on the table, Sheila

could not have been more startled. Then confusion laid hold of her, and, blushing crimson, she left John's side, and going round the table, seated herself on her father's knee, and with her arms about him sat for the rest of the supper-time silent and thoughtful, while the others discussed ways and means. At length, when all was settled, Mr. MacDonald rose.

'Well, my lad,' he said, 'time is getting on and we must get to bed. You will be away before we're stirring, so goodbye till June. Take care of yourself.'

'Goodbye, my boy,' the mother said fondly. 'I'm glad and proud to be able to call you that. God give you all journeying mercies!'

When the old people had gone, the lovers stood a moment looking after them, then John seated himself in one of the deck-chairs by the fire, and Sheila drew a hassock from beneath the table and sat at his feet; and with his arms about her and cheek to cheek, they sat staring into the coals, with a rapture in their hearts that was at first too great for words. But the prospect opened up by the events of the past hour were too wonderful to permit of a long silence, and presently they were busily engrossed in that dearest of all true lovers' tasks—the anticipating and planning out of the future.

But there were other things on John's mind, and presently he broke a little thrilling silence that had fallen on them.

'Sheila, dear,' he said. She raised her eyes to his inquiringly.

'Well, John?'

'There is one thing I've always wished to ask you.'

'Yes, John.'

' You remember the first day you came down to the camp? '

' Yes.'

' Well, I never could quite understand the way you talk'd to me that day. You know you—'

' Now, own up, John. You thought me just full of brazen impudence.'

' No ! ' John replied hastily, ' I wouldn't go so far as that.'

' Bold, then? '

' Well, not quite bold,' John said cautiously, ' but it didn't seem just like you.'

' You are quite right, dear,' she answered, putting her arms about his neck, ' and I would tell you all about it, only you would be so offended.'

But John declared that nothing Sheila could possibly say could possibly offend him.

' You're quite sure? '

' Quite.'

' Well, then, John, I'll tell you. It was just this. You looked so scared and woebegone, such a-forgive me, dear—but such a goose, that I couldn't help teasing you. I felt that you wanted a shake-up, and I tried to give you one. It was wrong of me, and when I got away I was dreadfully ashamed, and would have gone back to apologise, only somehow I couldn't—women can't apologise, you know, John.'

' No,' John returned sagely, ' of course not. Women have nothing to apologise about. They're not like men.'

The representative of the sex perfect bowed gravely in acknowledgment of his recognition of this obvious truth, and John resumed—

' There was no need to apologise. It did me a world of good. But, Sheila—'

'Well?'

'If you thought me such a—goose' (the word rather stuck in John's throat notwithstanding his humility, for no man cares to be likened to a goose), 'how did you come to think—better—of me?'

Sheila did not answer immediately—it took consideration.

'When you began to speak about Stevenson,' she said at length, 'you fairly amazed me and frightened me, too, for I saw then that you were very clever and eloquent' (John's face took on a look of genuine amazement), 'and I had been wretchedly mistaken in you. That's why I was ashamed. But you had interested me, too, and I could not get you out of my thoughts, and later on—'

'What, dear?'

'Well, later, when I came to understand the things you were doing to help those poor old navvies, I began to admire you. You know, John, we used to have lots of visitors—men—at home (father is a great politician), and they were always talking—talking—how to better the conditions of life—how to improve the lot of the worker! And there were all sorts of theories—Socialism, co-operation, this party in Parliament or that—and some of the younger men were very enthusiastic about the new ideas, and were working night and day to return candidates to Parliament. But the thing I never could understand was, that all the time the poor were all about them, and they never seemed to give them a thought. They talked about the "masses," but the term, as they used it, seemed only to represent some abstract idea, because, so far as I could see, the actual, individual poor man had no interest for them what-

ever beyond his vote, and it didn't seem to me real. And when they got their men into power, the poor were there just the same, and nobody a penny the better, so far as I could see. Then I came down here and I saw you just doing things—not talking, but doing. One could see you were not used to roughing it, and that a great deal of it must have meant a fearful ordeal to you, and yet there you were ; and, John, when I saw you fighting the men's battles and helping them to save their money and live good lives, I couldn't help admiring you ; for I do like a man in earnest —a doer. That was how I came to think better of you, John, and when a girl begins by admiring a man, it is not hard for her to love him.'

CHAPTER XLII

' GOODBYE, SHEILA '

JOHN received this explanation in a kind of wondering silence, and when it was finished he drew her fondly to him, and was about to speak, when a sound startled him. He raised his head swiftly.

' Listen, dear ! ' he whispered.

' What is it, John ? ' she asked in alarm.

' Was that the clock striking ? '

' Yes, John,' she replied with a shiver of apprehension, ' but don't let us think about it yet.'

' But it is late. The clock struck two.'

' But your train is not due till five.'

' But, darling, what about your bed ? '

' Oh, don't let us talk about bed, dear. You've got me and I've got you to-night, John, but only for a little. To-morrow you will be far away. When there's such a little time to be together why should we waste it sleeping ? John, that would be to murder time.'

Scarlett looked at her in wonder, then he rose up and flung another log on the fire. Again there was silence, and again it was John who broke it.

' Sheila, dear,' he began, in the tone which she had learnt to know denoted that he was puzzling over something.

' More questions, John ? '

‘ Only this one, dear.’

‘ Well? ’

‘ When you were in Melbourne, you were used to going about and meeting people. You must know lots of men.’

‘ I do.’

‘ And did they—did you—that is, did no one ever admire you before I came along? ’

Sheila laughed low and musically.

‘ Now, John,’ she demanded, turning to him, ‘ why ever do you ask that? ’

‘ No, but did they? ’

‘ Well, there were some who said they did.’

‘ I was sure of that,’ John replied, looking at her with a kind of awe. ‘ You are so beautiful, dear, so—’

But a slim white hand was placed firmly on his lips and—

‘ No more of that, John dear, please,’ she said. ‘ It’s not like you, and makes me think of some of those other men.’

But John was not to be silenced. He kissed away her hand, and then—

‘ Sheila! ’

‘ Well? ’

‘ Were any of the men you knew clever—or good-looking—or—or wealthy? ’

‘ Whatever are you trying to get at, John? ’

‘ No, but were they? ’

‘ Clever, good-looking, wealthy? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Some were all three.’

John was silent a while, thinking this over. Then—

‘ Don’t be angry, Sheila dear,’ he said, ‘ and forgive me if I seem to trespass, but did you never care—did you never return any man’s love? ’

'Never, darling,' she replied without hesitation, looking into his eyes. 'But why do you ask?'

'Because I can't understand, dear, for the life of me, how you could pass by other men and love me.'

'John!'

'Truly, dear.'

'Why, you old silly, it was because you were ever so—so infinitely above those men that I couldn't help myself.'

'But, Sheila!'

'Well?'

'How can you say that? Physically there's nothing of me. I'm just a—a weed.'

'You're not a weed, John, and I won't have it,' she said indignantly. 'You are not—massive—but you are perfectly symmetrical, and father says you must have the strength of a giant to have got through that sea. I detest big men,' she added. 'They make me think of prize bullocks at a show. All you think about them is how much they weigh, and want to prod them with your umbrella. There was one amongst—those you asked about, and people used to say what a magnificent man he was, and really, John, he was just six feet of—putty.'

But John was not convinced.

'Well, but,' he urged, 'apart from size—although for my part I admire big men—but apart from that, there are other things—my looks, the colour of my hair—and—'

'I like the colour of your hair,' Sheila interrupted, regarding it with satisfaction. 'We Australians have a dreadful tendency to lose all distinction of colour and sink into a kind of cosmopolitan brown. I like red hair, it's distinctive; and besides,' she added illogically, smoothing it

back from his forehead, ‘ yours is not red, John, it’s auburn.’

John laughed in good earnest now.

‘ Sheila,’ he said, ‘ you remember how, when Puck squeezed a certain juice on the eyes of the sleeping Titania, it made her see beauty even in old Bottom with the ass’s head on, and love him, too. I think Puck must have been getting at you. My hair is really ugly, and as for my mouth—’

‘ What’s wrong with your mouth?’ she queried in surprise. ‘ I’m sure your teeth are lovely.’

‘ My teeth are well enough, thank goodness,’ he replied, ‘ but my mouth is not half firm enough. It has always been a grief to me.’

She looked at him with a great appearance of criticism.

‘ It’s quite firm enough for me, John,’ she remarked at length decisively. ‘ If it were any firmer I should be afraid to live with you. What kind of mouth would you like?’

‘ I should like my jaws to “ bite ” together—like this,’ he replied, suiting the action to the word.

Sheila drew back with a great appearance of alarm.

‘ John,’ she cried, ‘ you frighten me. If you had jaws like that, I wouldn’t marry you for worlds. You would look like a bulldog! No, dear,’ she went on, surveying him fondly and with great approval, ‘ I wouldn’t have you altered for the world—not a bit. If you were bigger you would be too big, for you are just the right size; and if your hair, or your mouth, or anything about you were different, you wouldn’t be you, and then I couldn’t love you, for it’s you I love. I love you for what you are, and I couldn’t love you so well if you were something that you’re not. So

no more nonsense, John, dear. I had rather have you with all your faults than the most perfect man in the whole wide world beside. Now, does that satisfy you?'

'Beloved,' he replied, looking reverently into the dear eyes, 'your love to me is wonderful—passing the love of woman. You never seem to see me as I am, but always as I aspire to be in my best times. You fill me with humility and hope, too, and I will pray to God every day to make me something of what you believe me to be.'

Again the little white hand was pressed upon his lips.

'Enough, John,' she said tenderly. 'My heart seems just to ache to-night with the fulness of my love for you, and you seem no whit less beautiful to me than I to you. But this I know, John, that neither of us are really quite what we seem to each other now. There are depths of weakness and sin in both of us such as neither could believe possible of the other, and there are heights of good which even to-night we would not dare to hope for. But we each know our own hearts, and, believe me, John, if, knowing yourself, it amazes you that I could pass by all others and love you, knowing my heart as I do, it amazes me no less that you could pass all others by and love me.'

To John's sensitive, aching soul all this came as the balm of Gilead, healing the hurts of years, and he sat regarding her with eyes melting with tenderness, admiration, and love. He leaned towards her with outstretched arms, and then suddenly sprang up in alarm.

'What is it, dear?' she whispered, startled, clinging to him.

‘I heard a cock crow for the dawn. It must be four o’clock.’

‘No, darling,’ she urged, ‘that could not be. It is just a minute since the clock struck two.’

‘But listen, dear,’ he interrupted.

She listened, though against her will, and presently from some farm down the valley came the strident, throaty sound of a cock crowing. She only clung the closer to him.

‘John, dear,’ she said, ‘it can’t be—he’s crowing in his dreams.’

‘Listen again, Sheila !’ he cried directly, raising his head. ‘There ! The clock is striking. One ! Two ! Three ! Four ! Four o’clock, dear Sheila. It’s time for me to go.’

‘John, beloved,’ she cried brokenly, holding him fast. ‘Why do you wish to hurry away? Why are you so eager to leave me? Is Melbourne so precious to you? Is—’

‘God help me !’ he interrupted brokenly as he looked upon her, ‘leave you? Eager to leave you? Dearest, if you only knew what it costs to leave you ! How I would give my soul to stay with you ! Leave you ! Darling, I’ll not leave you,’ he said, sinking again into the chair. ‘I’ll sit by the fire with you, and we’ll wait till the day break and the shadows flee away, and your father and mother come. They will think it wrong of me, but what does it matter if you have me and I have you?’

‘No, John,’ she cried, suddenly rising up and going for his hat and coat. ‘I am mad, and cruel, too, to tear your poor heart so. Father and mother think the world of you, and you must not sacrifice their good opinion for my weakness. Come, John,’ she cried bravely, helping him into his things, ‘you must go out and do a man’s

work, and I must stay and pray and wait. And after all, it's but a little while, and then— !'

'And then !' he echoed, holding her to his heart.

They went out and stood together at the door. It was the chill before the dawning. The night was slowly dying in the sky. In the west the moon, pale and haggard as from a long night's vigil, rolled heavily towards the horizon. The morning star was fading over the hill. Down the valley of the Bass a great fog lay, looking to the watchers like an inland sea, and here and there a clump of trees, thrusting their heads through its filmy waves, suggested islands. While they watched, the night fled farther west and in the east a tinge of colour came.

'See, darling,' he cried, 'the night is over and gone. A new day has come. Surely it is a prophecy that the night of our loneliness is passing and the long, glad day we are to spend together is at hand.'

'God grant it,' she cried fervently, 'and hasten the dawn !'

But it was time to go. Already across the hills could be heard the rumble of the fast approaching train. She clung to him almost fiercely.

'Oh, John !' she moaned, and—

'Oh, Sheila !' he cried, with agony in his voice.

'How can I let you go, John ?'

'It is hard, Sheila dear,' he said brokenly, 'but it must be now. God bless you, my darling !' he added fondly, kissing the tears from her eyes. 'God bless you every day and all the day, and watch between us while we are absent one from another ! It will only be a little while, and then we'll always be together.'

'God bless you, John ! Be true to Him, and

you will not fail to be true to yourself and to me. Goodbye, John ! ’

‘God help me,’ he cried, ‘I will ! Goodbye, Sheila, goodbye ! ’

Then he tore himself away and ran down the hill.

Garfield and Hallum were waiting by the line with his luggage all ready. And it was as well they were, for, as John came to them the train swung round the curve and pulled up. The cab of the engine was full of men, so John must needs ride on top of a truck of coal, but that he did not mind. He shook hands warmly with the two men who had so often stood by him, and tried to speak his thanks. Then the train moved off, and he was gone.

He went as he had come, without sound of a trumpet. Nevertheless, he had done great things, whereof many were glad. He had made the camp fit for men to live in, and many of them, particularly the younger ones, had reason to bless the day he came. He had brightened and blessed scores of lives. He had saved the men’s money for their wives and children, and kept the wolf from many a door he had never seen. He had made good more thoroughly than he knew.

‘Well, there ’e goes,’ Garfield remarked, as the two men watched the figure on the truck fade in the morning mist. ‘There ’e goes, an’ may the blessing of God go with ’im ! ’E wasn’t big in the carcass, but wot there was of ’im was all man.’

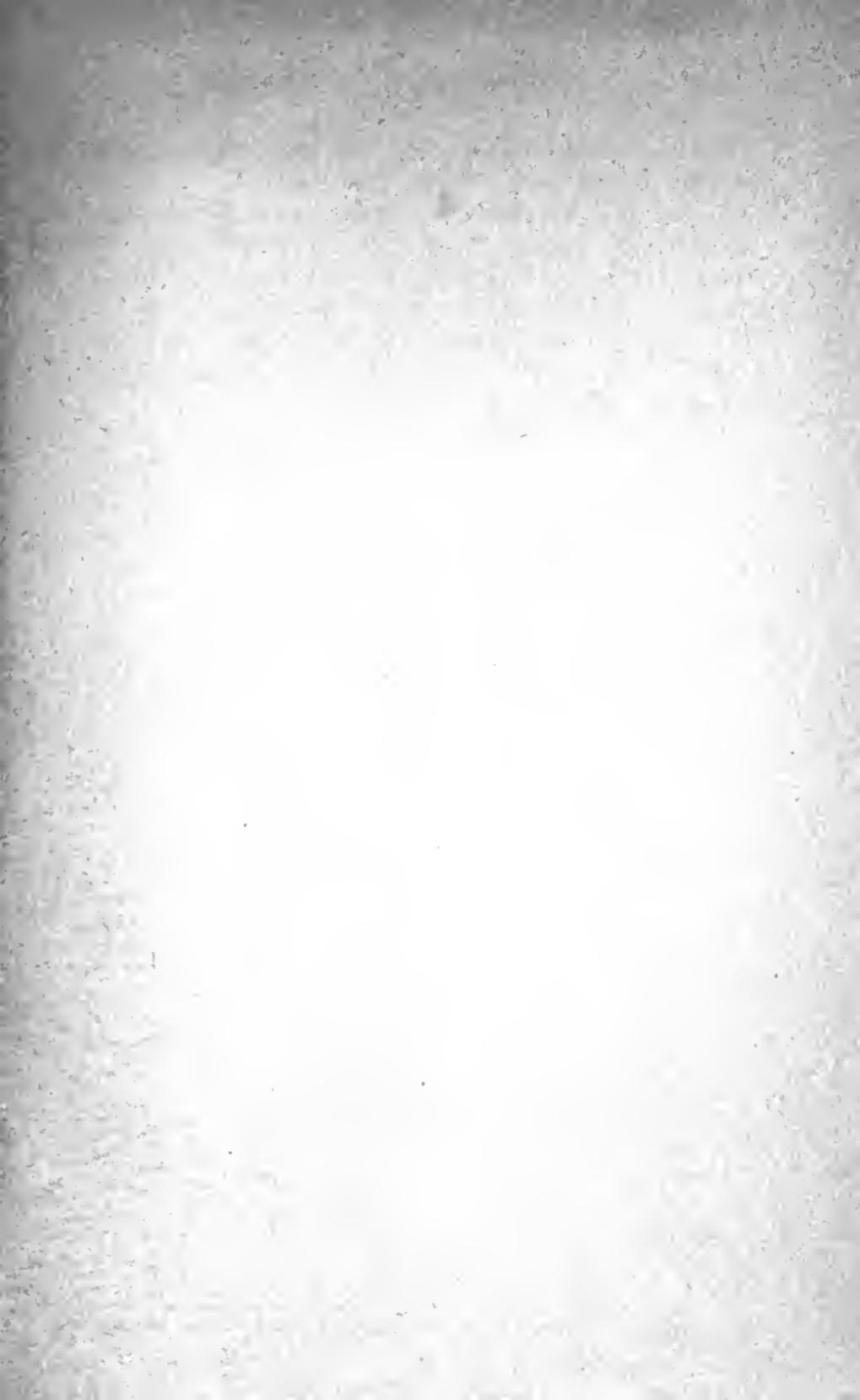
And so John Scarlett rode away from the Seventeen Mile, seated ingloriously on a load of coal with his back to the wind, and wrapped up in an old ’possum-skin rug. Presently, maybe, he would begin to chide himself for the opportunities he had

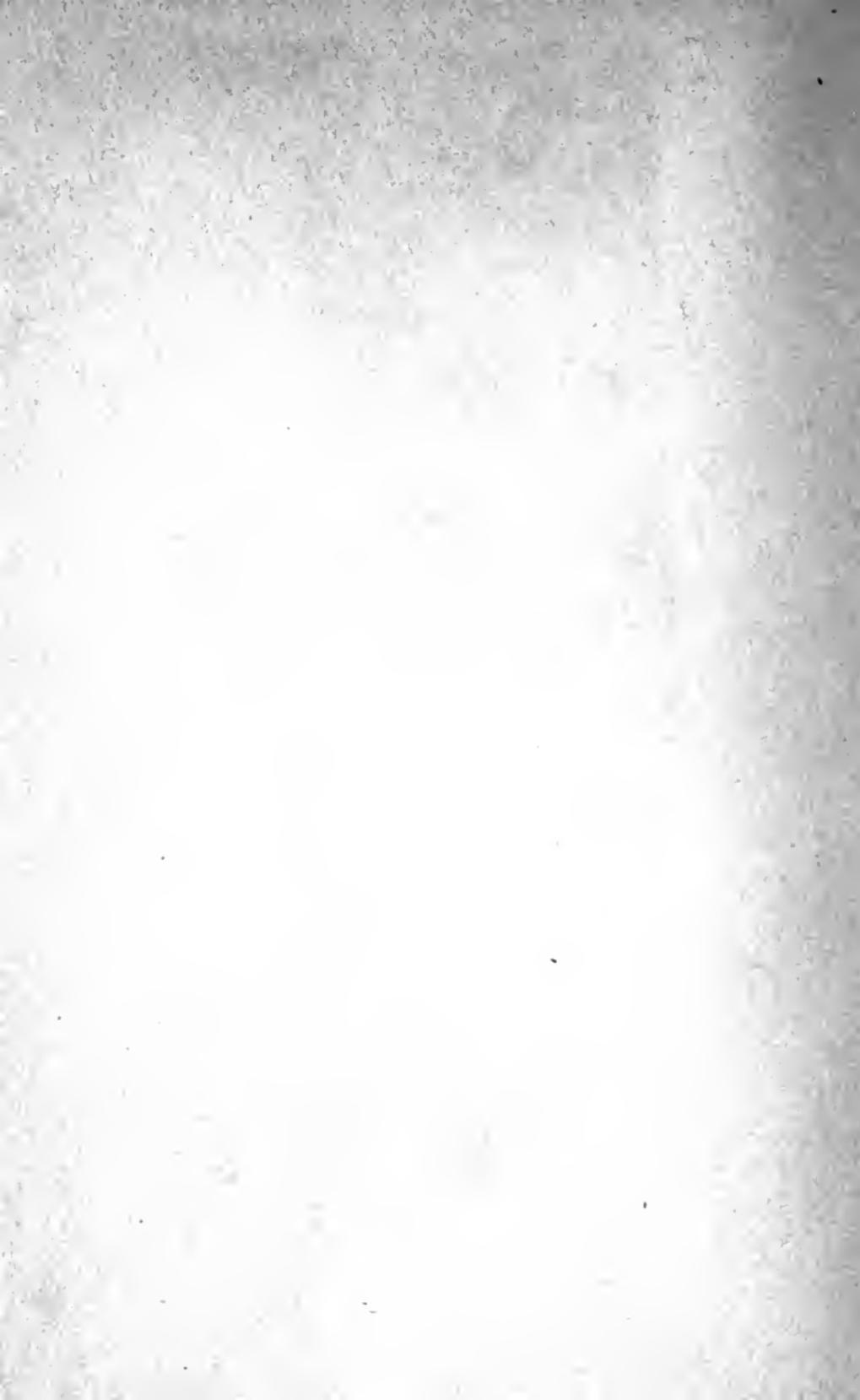
failed to make use of, but for the present his mind, upon that score, was easy.

'At all events I've tried,' he muttered, 'and I've done better than ever I could have hoped, and, anyhow, if I've not done much good for the men, they've done a world of good for me !'

Then he dismissed the camp from his mind and gave himself up to thoughts of Sheila MacDonald and the great days yet to be.

THE END





UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 139 109 3

